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Keshub Birth Centenary : 1938

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN

41|111

By

P. K. SEN, M.A., LL.D. (CANTAB.)

Published under the auspices of the Centenary Committee,
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PREFACE

For some time past there has been a demand for a concise presentation of the life and work of Keshub Chunder Sen. The Keshub Birth Centenary Committee decided on supplying the long-felt want. This little work is the result of their decision. Along with a brief account of the life of Keshub Chunder Sen, it seeks to portray as far as possible in his own words the grand ideal of Harmony which he preached and practised. So versatile was his genius, so deep and far-reaching its influence on his country and the world at large, that the task of writing anything like an adequate account within a short compass is fraught with difficulties. I may, therefore, claim the indulgence of the public to overlook such deficiencies as there may be in this book. A bibliography has been added at the end for assisting those who may wish to extend their knowledge of his works.

The Centenary Committee are deeply indebted to Mr. N. Mukherjee of the Art Press for generously undertaking to bear the entire cost of publication of this work.

Prosanto Kumar Sen.

Bayley Road,

Patna, January 1938.

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INTRODUCTORY

"He will live more really now that he is dead," said Max Müller,[1] "than he would be if his life had been spared for many years." This prophecy has come true. Over fifty years have passed since Keshub departed this life, and every year has brought him, unconsciously though it may be, nearer and nearer to the heart of India. The principles he preached and practised, the protests he encountered, the persecution he suffered, the message of Harmony he delivered, the social, moral, political, educational and economic reconstruction he envisaged, the doctrines he interpreted and even the disciplines he inculcated—all have now passed into the life-history of his people. Slowly, but surely, Keshub's life and message have leavened India. In the fulness of time they will leaven humanity. What is local and national in him, special and particular to the land of his birth and nurture, will remain the heritage of India; what is international and universal will be the heritage of the world.

The memorable nineteenth century forms a record of remarkable awakening and unfoldment,—nowhere more so than in India. In social, moral, political and religious reform it marks the period of India's renaissance. The time has come for the devout student of history to understand and appreciate the play of spiritual forces that brought it about. What is genius but a living focus through which moral, social and spiritual forces radiate? What is social or moral reconstruction but the natural outcome of this concentration of forces in outstanding personalities, or geniuses? Such a genius was Keshub. To study him is to study the time forces—the Time-Spirit and its dispensations

[1] Monograph on Keshub Chunder Sen, by Max Müller, 1884, soon after Keshub passed away on the 8th of January that year. See his *Biographical Essays*, Vol. II.

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for the uplift of humanity. To weed out what is temporal, adventitious and unessential and to get to the real substance of the man and his message, is worth the quest of every earnest seeker. And when that is done, the conviction is overwhelming that the force that was Keshub is more really alive to-day than it ever was.

It is futile to attempt a study of Keshub regardless of his moral and spiritual ancestry. He traces his descent from that family of God-intoxicated men who behold all the good things of this world, as well as of the next, flow only from the fulness of spiritual life. To walk in the ways of righteousness is with them the natural and essential pre-requisite to individual and social well-being. Let the man-soul, they say, be at one with the Over-soul, and all good will follow as the night the day. It is unprofitable, nay unreal, to regard them as mere reformers, mere benefactors of humanity—in the sense of having striven for material amelioration; though, in point of fact, the world stands indebted to them for much reform and much material good to humanity. With them, as with Keshub, the source and spring of all good is the prompting of the Spirit. Hence the key to well-being, individual or social, is the God-ward attitude. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all things shall be added unto you', has ever been their principle of living.

The first of his immediate predecessors was Raja Rammohan Roy whom Keshub reverently called 'our spiritual grand-father'. Rammohan is truly regarded as the father of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century. There was no evil—social, moral or religious, educational, economic or political—which escaped his eagle eye or his winnowing fan. There was not one major avenue of progress which his herculean activity did not traverse. It was he who gave the first rude shock to all manner of corruptions and trod the thorny path of the pioneer. He stood in solitary grandeur in the midst of utter darkness and sent forth his clarion call to freedom of thought, freedom of action, freedom of worship and freedom from all manner

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of abuses. The call went forth shrill and clear: 'Awake! Arise! Back to freedom, faith and fulness of life!' Alas! his was a cry in the wilderness. Not a comrade, fellow-worker or follower had he—none to whom he could hand over the torch. Before he went on his fateful visit to Europe in 1830 he established the first temple of catholic worship of the *Ekamevadvitiyam* (the One without a second), in spirit and in truth, to be open to all without distinction of creed, caste or colour. This was the beginning of what afterwards became the Brahma Samaj. But Rammohan himself in his life-time could not carry out the catholicity of his ideal in its entirety. To avoid wounding orthodox national feeling more than could be helped, he had the Vedas chanted in the temple by Brahmans only, and from an adjoining room where people of the inferior castes were not allowed to enter. To his mind, perhaps, the time had not arrived for taking a bolder step. Nor did he succeed in establishing a body or a brotherhood such as would accept his cosmopolitan ideal of worship and work, or such as would be committed to uphold and carry out its implications. No wonder that after the great Rammohan's death at Bristol in 1833 there was a lull. Everything was on the wane, and Rammohan's movement seemed for a time to be all but dead. But the seed that he had sown could not perish, and there soon arose another who, in the economy of Providence, was to take over the torch and carry it as his successor till Keshub Chunder Sen appeared on the scene. This second great leader of the Brahma Samaj was no other than Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, whom Keshub fondly looked up to as his "spiritual father".

The unique relationship that sprang up between the young man of twenty and the mature man of forty has rightly formed the theme for many a glowing tribute in and outside the Brahma Samaj. There is a law of the spiritual world by which these men who live by the Spirit come to find each other out, notwithstanding distance or disparity that stands between them. Their mental furniture, their outlook on life, may by no means be the same—

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the two may differ almost like polar opposites. But by divine dispensation each has his distinctive function to fulfil in the unfolding of one common purpose. Thus were Keshub and Devendranath drawn together in the divine net, despite contrarieties. But two such differing temperaments could not long act in unison. Soon the time came when they listened each to his inner voice, and parted. When they were together their hearts and souls were at one, and the Maharshi could find no term but *Abhinna-hridaya* (undivided in spirit) to express the relation that existed. The Maharshi named him *Brahmananda* (Rejoicer in God), he ordained him as *Acharya* (Minister), and even after the parting he saw with prophetic eye the future mission of Keshub,—Reconstruction.

The union of Keshub and Devendranath and their separation due to differing ideals determined not only the later history of the Brahma Samaj but the thought life of India as a whole. After the separation Keshub's work took him far out of the narrow confines of the Brahma communion as it then was. It became cosmopolitan, assumed protean variety, and magnetised every conceivable sphere of social, moral and national reconstruction.

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I

FAMILY AND ANCESTRY

His earthly life was but a brief span of forty-five years. (19th November 1838—8th January 1884). He was born at Calcutta in the Colutola residence of the Sen family.* His natal chamber, now marbled and made respectable, was a damp, dingy, ill-ventilated apology for a room, on the ground-floor. Not that there was dearth of accommodation in the house. But owing to unforeseen circumstances, a room had anyhow to be improvised in a strange corner. Hence it so came to pass that the illustrious reformer, destined to take the vow of poverty and to preach and practise the lesson of abstinence and asceticism, saw the light in the lowliest of surroundings.

A scion of the distinguished Sen family of Garifa, tracing its descent from Ballal Sen, the Vaidya King of Bengal, a grandson of Dewan Ram Kamal Sen whose name was a household word in Bengal, and a son of Peary Mohan Sen distinguished for probity, piety and beneficence, Keshub had a noble ancestry. His moral heritage was as great as the rank, refinement and dignity to which he was born. Wealth without the pride that goes with it, charity without ostentation, true Vaishnava piety, and a simplicity bordering on asceticism, coupled with enthusiasm in all endeavours after the common weal of society —these are the qualities invariably associated with the character and memory of his self-made grandfather, as also of his father Peary Mohan. Indeed, in those days Dewan Ram Kamal's was a name to conjure with.

Ram Kamal Sen was a contemporary of Raja Rammohan Roy. He was one of that small handful of men of whom it has been said that the seeds of superior Western example found in them a soil truly Indian, and yet brought

* The Sens originally belonged to Garifa, a village about twenty-four miles from Calcutta on the river Hooghly.

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forth abundant fruit. Far from being westernised, they imbibed and assimilated a few of the good things that the West had to offer, and with their aid built up for themselves careers and characters full of will, enterprise and intrepidity, honesty and integrity. Ram Kamal began life at seventeen as an assistant type-setter in the Asiatic Society's Press. By dint of his industry and intelligence he gradually rose to the clerkship, thence to the office of Native Secretary to the Royal Asiatic Society. He attracted the attention of the celebrated Orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson with whom thus sprang up a life-long friendship and mutual esteem. Ram Kamal had started life in poverty, and had had little or no opportunity in early life to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. He was not slow to seize and utilise the opportunities now afforded by his association with the learned Society to start on an intensive course of study and research. Soon he was admitted to the membership of the Council of the Society. His honesty and integrity won him such an enduring reputation that he shortly found himself in the office of Treasurer of the Calcutta Mint—a position of great responsibility. Success in the last mentioned post brought him the coveted honour of being appointed Dewan of the Bank of Bengal on a monthly pay of Rs. 2,000/-. His enthusiasm for knowledge and culture led him to appreciate the existing difficulties in the way of self-education and, in the rare moments of his leisure, he started compiling an elaborate dictionary of English and Bengali words. How great was the appreciation of this work in those days may be gathered from a review of it in the *Friend of India* (edited by Dr. Marshman of Serampore fame) which remarked "This dictionary is the fullest, most valuable work of its kind which we possess, and will be the most lasting monument of Ram Kamal Sen's industry, zeal and erudition. It is perhaps the work by which his name will be recognised by posterity." But Ram Kamal's activities were not confined to authorship only. Whether it was the Hindu College, started in 1817, the Sanskrit College, started in 1818, the Doveton College, for the education of

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Dewan Ram Kamal Sen

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European and Anglo-Indian children, or the District Charitable Society, or a hundred other endeavours after the welfare of his countrymen, Ram Kamal was ever ready with his talents and unremitting energies to promote their advancement.

Amid all the wealth and distinction which he achieved, Ram Kamal in his personal habits remained simple to a degree, almost an ascetic. He had only one meal at the end of the day and even that he cooked with his own hands —a spare meal of boiled rice and vegetables—occasionally a guava thrown in to do duty for vegetables! A strict Vaishnava, joyous in the consciousness of service to God and his fellow men, he lived up to the age of sixty years (1783 A.D.—1843 A.D.) and died when his tiny grandson was only about five years of age. It is said that he was often heard to observe that Baso (the pet name by which Keshub was known in the family) would sustain the reputation of the family. Indeed, as Keshub's biographer and lifelong friend puts it: "His (Ram Kamal's) genius and his labours pre-figured the catholic, many-sided career of his illustrious grandson."* Peary Mohan, though not known to fame like his father Ram Kamal, kept up the good name of the family and succeeded his father in the high office of Dewan of the Bank of Bengal. Those that knew him speak of him as a handsome man of great charm of manners, striking personality and outstanding piety and integrity. He died at the early age of thirty-four when Keshub was only about nine years old. The charge of Keshub's upbringing thus fell on his mother Sarada Devi.

* *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* by P. C. Mozoomdar, p. 49—republished by Navavidhan Trust, 1931. The following passage which occurs on the same page is of great interest, in view of the large place which prayer filled in the spiritual life of Keshub Chunder Sen:—

"Some years ago in turning over the old family papers with Keshub, we lighted upon a number of beautiful Bengali prayers in manuscript, all written in a scrupulously neat hand by Ram Kamal Sen. The devotions were intended for familiar use. They were adapted to different occasions of life, to be said in the morning and evening, before meals, or when leaving for distant journeys. The sentiments were simple, devout, a pure heart-felt piety pervaded them all."

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She came from the same village, Garifa, and belonged to a family of the Shakta persuasion but with none of the prejudices and proclivities of the Shakta cult. By nature deeply religious, her religious instincts were further deepened by the sorrows, trials and tribulations through which she had to pass in her early widowhood, till they mellowed down to that calm faith and trust that lit up her later years. She stood by her illustrious son through the trials and persecutions of his stormy career and entered thoroughly into the spirit of the new life which he preached and practised. In Keshub's last moments, when he lay in physical agony but in perfect spiritual readiness for the last journey, the mother heart of Sarada Sundari cried out in bitterness: "Your pain my child," she said, "is the outcome of my sins. The righteous son suffers for the wretched parent's unworthiness." "Oh! say not so, mother dear," replied Keshub, "know that the Supreme Mother sends it all to me for my good. Where can there be another mother like you? Your virtues God has given me. All that I call my own is yours." So saying he took the dust of her feet and put it on his head. After this, hardly anything is needed for the biographer to show to what extent Keshub was indebted to the influence of his saintly mother for all that he became in after life.

Keshub's biographer presents the following pen-portrait of Sarada Devi, as she was in her closing years, which in turn shows the influence of Keshub's great life on his loving mother: "There is an awful calm about her aged brow since the death of her great son. Her form has not lost, but gained in dignity by her unspeakable sorrow. She bears ample testimony to Keshub's worth, she considers him hardly human. Fervent and sweet-tempered in her piety always, there is a strange dignity and pathos in her prayers now, which seems to be of another world. When she comes to Keshub's domestic sanctuary at times, and offers her sorrowing devotions, the whole congregation is melted to tears, and thrilled into awe. Truthful, tender and sympathetic always, there is now a motherly kindness about

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her ways which few can forget. All, all who see her, whatever their feelings, whatever their differences, find a ready welcome. Yet she is identified in love with one only, from one source she draws her inspiration of goodness and that is Keshub, her darling departed son."*

KESHUB'S TRUE CASTE

It would be anything but fair to Keshub's memory, were we to be content with tracing his family and ancestry in the time-honoured fashion. As years passed, Keshub himself discovered that in his heart of hearts he had little in common with the Sens of Garifa—with all their pomp and circumstance, power and prestige. "I was reared," says Keshub, "by a wealthy father and grand-father. Opulence and luxury surrounded my childhood. But as I grew up in years the inherent poverty of my spirit began to show itself." It is not that he embraced poverty as a matter of principle, penance or duty—he came to perceive that his caste was that of the poor, and he reckoned himself as one of them:

Often have I asked myself whether my soul is of rich or poor lineage. The answer to this question forms an important chapter of my *Jeevan-veda*. One must know the caste in which one's soul is born * * * * I am convinced that my soul belongs to the class of the poor. My blood is that of the poor, my brain is that of the poor. The articles of food, my daily habits—all bear ample evidence of the spirit of the poor. * * * The practice of poverty is not a difficult exercise with me; it comes naturally. My nature takes delight in (plain) rice and herbs. This fact reveals to me an unspeakable secret of my inner life. I take it to be a sign of God's special grace for me. If I have to travel by railways, I usually go third class. I hesitate to travel first class lest I transgress my own province and trespass on the domain of the rich; lest things and thoughts foreign to my nature rob me of rest and peace of mind. And the decision comes in an instant,—the mind instinctively seeking the place where the poor and the lowly are. If ever I travel first class, it is because I am obliged to. * * * Where the poor are there is rest for me, there is life for me. I never learnt

* *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, pp. 52-53.

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this poverty by effort, it came to me naturally * * * Do I not sit with the rich? Do I not shake hands with great people? What of that? Does that change my mind? If the Chandala* touches the hand of the Brahmana, does he thereby become a Brahmana? If the man who feeds on rice and herbs is feasted once in the house of the Emperor, does he become a rich man? Nature never changes, and therefore I can safely mix with every one. I also know and determine by secret signs who have the badge of my caste. But one thing I must say—what I find in this scripture: Though I always keep the company of the poor and the ragged, though my dearest friends are those who are content with little, yet I honour the rich too. It was said of old 'Hate the rich and give honour to the poor; salvation is not for the rich; where there is rank and prosperity no virtue can abide—religion dwells only in the hovel'. But the scripture of the New Dispensation teaches us: 'Honour the rich and the poor alike; they both go forward on the path to heaven. There is no harm if a man is outwardly rich, when he is poor in spirit. Love the rich and the poor impartially. God the source of all righteousness dwells alike in the palace and in the cottage'."†

* Chandala is a low, untouchable caste.

† *Jeevan-veda*, Chap. XIV.

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II

BOYHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

(1847-1857)

As a boy Keshub was marked out by unusual intelligence, strict morals and rather reserved and taciturn habits. The progress he made in his studies was phenomenal. Though younger than the average student in his class, he was looked up to with respect by his class fellows, almost with awe. "His simple boyish beauty was angelic."[1] The purity of his character was beyond cavil or question, in fact, was contagious—it made his companions feel that no association with him was possible unless they too were minded to eschew evil and impurity. In the library and the classroom, in the company of his teachers or elsewhere, he carried with him a calm and thoughtful reserve which could not but win him the respect and admiration of the boys. Ever mild and gentle, without a touch of anger or ill-temper, free from falsehood and free from vice he seemed to be on a plane far and away above that of the average student. Indeed, the boys looked up to him as a saint in their midst. Apart from excelling in his studies, his talents found expression in other ways. In improvising new games, mastering and exhibiting the juggler's art, organising impromptu dramatic and concert performances and in many other daring enterprises that could take a boy's fancy, he proved a past master, and evinced unusual resourcefulness and power of command. His friend and biographer Mozoomdar observes, "as a boy he was the pride of his mother's heart, the delight of his family, the ornament of his school, the glory of his village and the natural leader of his companions. * * * He was a born king in our boyish world". [2] Of spirituality, or religious intensity, there was

[1] *Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* by P. C. Mozoomdar, p. 58—Navavidhan Trust, 1931.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

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yet no indication. His school life was marked by moral rigour rather than by religious earnestness. The spirit of poverty to which reference has been made in the last chapter had not yet made its appearance.

The years of adolescence that followed found him first at Hindu College, then at the Metropolitan, thence back to the Hindu College, these unfortunate changes at the instance of his guardians seriously interfering with his regular progress. From 1856 to 1858 he principally devoted himself to the study of philosophy as a casual student under the guidance of Mr. Jones, the Professor of Philosophy.

RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

But there came a significant change over him during this period, which was of greater moment to his future work than his intellectual pursuits. It was the dawning of a religious consciousness and the chastening and the purification that goes with it. Not that there was no trace of religious feeling in his school days. Only, it came to him now with a power and a spontaneity he had never experienced before. What made him abjure all animal food at the age of fourteen? As it was, in a Vaishnava family such as his, meat was a rarity. But he gave up fish-eating too. Was it on the principle of *Ahimsa*? Or, was it due to that nameless spontaneity that led him to seek poverty and plain-living of his own choice as a thing natural and appropriate to him? There is no definite clue to the exact cause of it. It is clear that in his own case he thought it would be a sin to do otherwise. He never made it a code of conduct for others. But for his associates he always approved and encouraged vegetarianism and many if not most of them became vegetarians. In the *Nava Samhita** written in the last year of his life (1883) he says: "As for meat, let those abstain who have taken the vow of

* "New Code,"—his last work in which Keshub Chunder Sen laid down the laws for guidance of the householder in all the essentials of plain-living and high-thinking, making it quite clear that it was the spirit of it that was to be observed, not the letter.

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poverty and simplicity and are pledged to self-denial, with a view to guard themselves and their neighbours against carnality." The same spontaneity that made him a vegetarian early in life led him to pray. It was simple, artless, heartfelt, spontaneous prayer. When he knew not how to pray, he wrote prayers, morning and evening, and read them in solitude on the terrace of his house. He saw evil and impurity in himself, and spontaneously sought divine help for deliverance. He saw evil and impurity outside, in the society round about him, in the land of his nurture, in the country from one end to the other, and that made him restless all the more. He wrote exhortations and warnings and stuck them on to the house-walls in his neighbourhood. It was too real an experience to admit of a false humility that sees sin in oneself and none in others. While he was consumed with a sense of his own sins and shortcomings, he felt that they were but a part of the aching imperfections of the people round about him with whom he was organically connected. That wonderful sense of oneness, undividedness (*abhinnata*), at-one-ment with all, which became a passion with Keshub later in life, was already making itself felt in this period of his early *Sadhana* or preparation.

ASCETICISM AND AUSTERITIES

He began to practise severe austerities. The same spontaneity that made him seek shelter in plain-living and poverty drove him to seek chastening through austerities. This was but the beginning. Again and again Keshub betook himself to it at different stages of his life. He did so for himself, he prescribed it for his comrades; and he reaped harvest a hundredfold. Many years after, in 1875, there was a renewal of asceticism. They raised a war-cry against it. They jeered and scoffed at the name of self-discipline and asceticism. But Keshub gently said: "It is needed. That is my explanation. Providence has pointed out this remedy for many of the besetting evils of the Samaj in these days. A little asceticism is needed as an antidote. How long our

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people shall require it, and in what forms, He alone knows who is guiding us. It may be only for the time, or for six months, or for two years, or in a qualified form for all life. Do regard it then as a remedy for the time, most urgently needed." Thus gently admonishing them he went on to define what his asceticism was not, and what it was: "If you come and see us as we are, you will be surprised to find how little we possess of that sort of asceticism. * * * If we were like the Roman Catholics, or the Indian hermits, the sharp criticisms called forth would have been deserved. But here those who know facts say no such thing. This, however, I will not conceal from you—I love and wish to encourage asceticism. But my asceticism is not what is ordinarily accepted as such. * * * Energy, philanthropy, meditation, work, self-sacrifice, intellectual culture, domestic and social love—all these are united in my asceticism."[1]

Alas! the time was not ripe for it, the people were not ready for that type of asceticism. Between the two opposite extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence they could see no middle path of self-imposed poverty or austerity for the sake of better discipline and better service. It needed a whole life-time of fiery precepts and every-day practice to prepare them for it. And now, in the economy of Providence, history is repeating itself in the nation. The same precept and practice is incarnated in the sage of Sabarmati whose vow of poverty and code of self-denial are bringing the nation back to Brahmananda. All honour to Mahatma Gandhi and his close associates for proving to the world that the salt has not lost its savour; that the way to self-expression lies through self-reverence, self-knowledge and self-control; that the way to life lies through self-denial and self-sacrifice. The only difference, if any, is that with Keshub life came first and politics was only a part of it; but in the fifty years that have passed since Keshub left this world, politics seems to have obtained a monopoly license

[1] Extract from Keshub's letter to Miss Collet.—*Brahmo Year Book*, 1877, p. 22.

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over life itself and, in the words of Sir John Culpepper speaking of monopoly in the Long Parliament, "it sups in our cup, it dips in our dish, it sits by our fire". Indeed, it has over-swept our whole social life.

In 1856, came his marriage, quite unexpected. He had, as in orthodox households, little say in the matter. His guardians, according to time-honoured usage, settled the match with a little girl of nine or ten, Jaganmohiny Devi, daughter of Chandra Kanta Mozoomdar. The marriage took place in the village Bali, across the river Hughly, about six miles to the north of Calcutta. Marriage amongst the Hindus is no doubt a sacrament but, in the majority of cases, the ceremony has lost its significance as a sacrament. Keshub though a party to it was, if anything, a mere passive actor. It went off with due pomp and circumstance. But Keshub's heart was elsewhere. "My honey-moon," says he, "was spent amid austerities in the house of the Lord." He had very little to do with his wife. For some years of his married life he was more an anchorite than a husband. "He developed in his ideas of conjugal relations as he developed in other things till in the end his domestic life became a true model for all."[1] But at the moment he was absorbed in his austerities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS EARLY SPIRITUAL CULTURE

It is singularly characteristic of him that the stuff of which these austerities were made was the same as, or similar to, that of 1875 above referred to. They were not calculated to make him self-centred, seeking spiritual fruition in barren self-mortification. Were it so, it would not have found expression in those incessant efforts after moral and spiritual fellowship with comrades and kindred souls during this pregnant period. His self-discipline led him on to establish schools, classes, societies and fraternities. Keshub founded them, fostered them, unremittingly worked for them with the sweat of

[1] *Life and Teachings*, p. 63.

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his brow, turning his associates into ardent fellow workers under his guidance. The British India Society (1854), the Colutola Evening School (1855), the Good Will Fraternity (1857) are but three out of the host of organisations which he established and maintained. A hallowed memory of these three, as also of the Brahma Vidyalaya and the Sangat Sabha which flourished later, has survived to this day. The others have passed into the limbo of oblivion. But the work that they did abides. And now that the country is flooded with clubs and societies—some for 'self-improvement', some for 'mutual protection', when the nation sits down to cast up its figures and reckon the profit and loss, will not the credits mount up only for such of them as, like Keshub's, looked more to others than to themselves and practised the hard code of self-denial?

Keshub's *sadhana*,[1] it must be admitted, during these early years of prepartion was bleak, hard, austere, with none of the sweetness or flavour of fruition. He was sowing in tears with no thought, or even hope perhaps, of reaping in gladness. Trust there was—a blind unquestioning trust. Faith there was—a spontaneous faith of which the lineaments could not then be visualised even by himself. Enthusiasm? Yes, a rough, fiery, tempestuous enthusiasm that took him he knew not where. The thoughts that took possession of him and the topics over which he poured forth a torrent of words full of feeling were those of Truth, Faith, Prayer, Free Will, Sin, Conversion, Inspiration, Universal Brotherhood, Eternity and the like. Not only did he think hard, but he read hard. From 11 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening he was to be found at his table in Metcalf Hall,[2] poring over philosophy, metaphysics and poetry. The works of the Scottish School of philosophers—Reid, Hamilton M' Cosh—and those of Morell, Victor Cousin, Theodore Parker, Miss Cobbe, Emerson and the like, furnished ample food for his voracious mind. He made

[1] Moral and spiritual discipline and preparation.
[2] Now the Imperial Library, the oldest and biggest public Library of Calcutta.

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friends with Milton, Young and Shakespeare—and it proved a life-long friendship. Apart from reading he dived deep into himself, seeking light and guidance from Within. He prayed for what his being needed—faith, love and purity. He prayed for what his country needed—catholic love and national unity. He prayed for what the world needed—Universal Brotherhood. In the whole realm of earnest human aspiration and endeavour there are few such examples of a plain, natural man spontaneously seeking purification through plain and natural channels—plain-living and prayer, communion with God, communion with his fellow men—thus equipping himself for his life-work. It is this plainness about him that makes him to-day the prophet of the plain man—the struggling and the striving, the youthful, the untutored and the unendowed.

Years after in England, in the year 1870, he thus delineated in his own words his early struggles:

> English education unsettled my mind, and left a void; I had given up idolatry but had received no positive system of faith to replace it. And how could one live on earth without a system of positive religion? At last it pleased Providence to reveal Himself unto me. I had not a single friend to speak to me of religion, God and immortality. I was passing from idolatry into utter worldliness. Through Divine grace, however, I felt a longing for something higher; the consciousness of sin was awakened within me, sin was realised in the depth of my heart in all its enormity and blackness. And was there no remedy? Could I continue to bear life as a burden? Heaven said 'No! Sinner, thou hast hope,' and I looked upward and there was a clear revelation to me. I felt that I was not groping in the dark as a helpless child, cast away by his parents in some dreary wilderness. I felt that I had a Heavenly Friend always near to succour me. God himself told me this—no book, no teacher, but God Himself, in the secret recesses of my heart. God spoke to me in unmistakeable language and gave me the secret of spiritual life, and that was prayer, to which I owed my conversion. I at once composed forms of prayer for every morning and evening, and used them daily, although I was still a member of no Church on earth, and had no clear apprehension of God's character and attributes. I felt profoundly the efficacy of prayer in my own experience. I grew in wisdom, purity and love. But after this I felt the need of

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the communion of friends from whom I might be enabled, in times of difficulty and doubt, to receive spiritual assistance and comfort. So I felt that not only belief in God was necessary but I wanted a real brotherhood on earth. Where was this true church to be found? I did not know. Well, I established in my earlier days a small fraternity, in my own house, to which I gave the somewhat singular but significant name of the "The Goodwill Fraternity." I did not allow myself for one moment to honour sectarianism, but preached to my friends these two doctrines—God our Father, every man our brother. When I felt that I wanted a Church, I found that the existing sects and churches would not answer my purpose. A small publication of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj fell into my hands, and I read the chapter on 'What is Brahmaism'? I found that it corresponded exactly with the inner conviction of my heart, the voice of God in the soul. I always felt that every outward book must be subordinated to the teachings of the Inner Spirit—that where God speaks through the Spirit in man all earthly teachers must be silent, and every man must bow down and accept in reverence what God thus revealed in the soul. I at once determined that I would join the Brahma Samaj, or Indian Theistic Church.[1]

[1] *Lectures in England, 1870.*

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III

PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

(1858-1862)

So to the Brahma Samaj he went. He signed the printed covenant sent to him for that purpose, and quietly became a member, without going through the prescribed ceremony of declaration before the Minister and the congregation.[1] It was a critical juncture—a parting of the ways in the history of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj. The paternal presiding spirit of the Samaj, Maharshi Devendranath, tired of the wranglings and the rule of majority that threatened to control its destinies, had retired to the serene heights of the Himalayas where he was spending his days in deep contemplation and meditation. Prominent among those who remained on the plains at the helm of affairs were men of the stamp and calibre of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutt. Great as was the debt of the Samaj to them for their unique intellectual contribution, and for the splendid support they lent to Devendranath in rejecting the infallibility of the Vedas, religious enthusiasm was no part of their mental furniture. They were characterised more by a critical and analytical bent of mind than by piety, or depth of religious fervour. In course of time, however, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar went and found more congenial fields for his activities and Akshay Kumar Dutt had to retire to inactivity on grounds of continued ill-health. It was at this psychological moment that Keshub brought with him to the Calcutta Brahma

[1] "This was a somewhat private arrangement. The ordinary usage for an intending convert was to stand up before the pulpit at the end of the monthly morning service and make a declaration of faith before the Minister and the congregation. The document was then signed by the candidate for initiation and countersigned by the *Pravartaka* or the person who induced him to accept the religion of the Brahma Samaj."—*Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* republished by the Navavidhan Trust, 1931.

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Samaj in ample measure the fire and the faith that burns in a truly consecrated soul. Keshub thus describes his own conversion:

> In utter helplessness I threw myself at my Father's feet. And at last it pleased Providence to reveal the light of truth in a most mysterious manner, and from that time commenced a series of struggles, aspirations and endeavours which resulted, I am happy to say, in the conversion of my heart.[1]

In 1858 Devendranath heard the Call, as he beautifully records in his Autobiography[2] and returned from the hills in November 1858. He was greatly impressed by the personality, self-consecration, ability and enthusiasm of the young recruit. The result was a true and abiding attachment between Keshub and Devendranath which led the way to their working together in perfect unison. Together they started planning and carrying out measures of far-reaching importance to the community at large.

THE FIRST TRIAL

But his trials were now to begin. Hitherto he had been passing through the school of self-discipline. The training that he had thus received formed his convictions and shaped his resolves. The actual conflict with the established order—family, friends, society—was still to come. Within a year of his joining the Calcutta Brahma Samaj, came the first of these struggles. It was in connection with the proposed initiation (*diksha*) of Keshub at the hands of the family *Guru* (spiritual preceptor). The office of the *Guru* is hereditary. He is looked upon as verily the path to salvation and is paid semi-divine honours. He goes occasionally on rounds to the families which are hereditarily associated with him as *jajmans* (disciples). During these visits it is the practice of the orthodox families to get their young folk receive *Diksha* (initiation) at the hands of the *Guru*. In the usual course, the *Guru* of the Sen family came round on his visit to their Colutola

[1] *Lectures in England, 1870.*
[2] See *Atma-charita*, Chapter XXXVIII.

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SENTED

house and it was decided by the elders that young people in the house, including Keshub, were to receive initiation and the saving formula (*mantra*) from him. In his mind and heart Keshub had done with such lifeless ceremonies. It was not in him to submit to a form from which the spirit had long since departed, or to subscribe to a formula which could not claim the approval of his conscience. He consulted his spiritual confidant, the Maharshi, who left it to Keshub's own inner voice. And that voice prevailed. Keshub definitely refused.

While the incident caused an estrangement in Keshub's relations with his family elders, it knit him closer to the heart of Devendranath. The nearer to Devendranath the farther from correct society, so thought the Sen *paterfamilias*. For, the Tagores though living within the Hindu society and observing the religious rites and ceremonies of the Brahmins, were somewhat outside the pale of strict orthodoxy. Whatever might have been the reason, the exclusion such as it was does not seem to have affected the position, culture or influence of the Tagores. If anything, it has enabled them to pursue their course unhampered by social tyranny, and thus to accelerate their own progress. In addition to this prejudice against them in general, there was the further prejudice against Devendranath, in particular, for having abjured idolatrous practices and taken his stand on reformed Hindu Theism. No wonder, therefore, that the growing intimacy and attachment between Keshub and Devendranath should have become a source of alarm to the Sens of Colutola. In another four or five months, however, they discovered that it was impossible to restrain Keshub's heterodox proclivities. On the 27th of September 1859, he was missed, and on anxious search it was found that Keshub had sailed for Ceylon in the company of Devendranath, his son Satyendranath (later, a member of the Indian Civil Service) and a friend of the name of Kali Kamal Gangooly. This was Keshub's first sea-voyage. Indeed, it was his first outing beyond the confines of Bengal. It brought him mental as

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well as spiritual exhilaration, and he returned with redoubled energy for his work. While on the point of landing he makes the following entry in his Diary: "Father, may I serve Thee and glorify Thy name with increasing zeal and earnestness and *make truth the centre of my thoughts and actions.* May I by Thy grace and the help of those great ideas with which Thou hast filled my mind grow day by day in grace and holiness. Hail fatherland! Hail!"

WIDOW REMARRIAGE DRAMA

Early in 1859 Keshub plunged into new activities. He was always partial to drama. He now took it up as an instrument for awakening society to the need for social, moral and spiritual reformation. In his early adolescence he had staged Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and had himself played the part of the hero with consummate skill. In the maturity of his life he again gave ample evidence of his appreciation of the stage as a powerful educative factor by staging the *Navabrindavan* drama and playing the parts of producer, organiser and actor in it. He now conceived the idea of placing on the stage the *Bidhava-Vivaha Natak* (Widow Remarriage Drama) and thereby awakening his countrymen to the endless sorrows and sufferings of the girl widow in India. He was coach, organiser, stage-manager, all in one, and he utilised the earnest souls of the Colutola Evening School and the Good Will Fraternity as the *dramatis personæ.* It was altogether a new enterprise and perhaps in the history of modern India, the first of the so-called social 'problem plays'. Its effect on the public mind was deep and abiding. From the highest to the humblest, all classes of people, including the great Vidyasagar, whose name will always be gratefully remembered for all that he did for ameliorating the condition of widows, were profoundly moved. Keshub succeeded in enlisting the active sympathy and support of right-thinking men in suppressing the evils of early marriage and of enforced widowhood.

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L... BANA...

BRAHMA VIDYALAYA

In May 1859, he started the *Brahma Vidyalaya* (Brahma School), an institution which was destined to play a considerable part in developing and clarifying the theology of the Brahma Samaj, and in furnishing an intellectual background to the spiritual education of the young and the earnest. The classes of the *Vidyalaya* used to be held every Sunday at which while Devendranath discoursed in Bengali on the attributes of God, on the relation of man to his Maker and on the transcendental joys of spiritual communion, Keshub held forth in English on the philosophical basis of Brahmaism and on the ethical aspects of spiritual life—conscience, self-sacrifice, love and service. The bulk of the pupils was recruited from the Colutola Evening School and the Good Will Fraternity. In fact, as Mozoomdar puts it, "four institutions now ran abreast of each other under Keshub's supervision. There was the Colutola Evening School, the Good Will Fraternity, the Brahma School and the Theatre at Chitpore Road."[1] To give publicity to the subject matter of the discourses at the *Vidyalaya*, Maharshi's addresses were published in the form of a book entitled *Brahma Dharmer Mata O Viswas* (the Faith and Principles of the Brahma Samaj) and the lectures that Keshub delivered began to be published monthly in the form of twelve tracts ('Tracts for the Times') beginning with 'Young Bengal—This is for you' in June 1860. Amid the vast variety of Keshub's writings, speeches, prayers and sermons, in English as well as in Bengali, these twelve tracts seem to have been almost forgotten. But though written at the early age of twenty-two they disclose a maturity and an intensity of conviction which is remarkable. Indeed some of them vividly body forth his maturest views, held later in life, as for instance on prayer, inspiration, God-vision, on social and educational reform, on patriotism and politics, on sectarianism or universal brotherhood.

[1] *Life and Teachings*, Navavidhan Trust edition, p. 75.

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'Young Bengal—This is for you' even to this day is a fitting exhortation to all young men of India on the diverse phases of earnest endeavour which call for their co-operation. Thus does Keshub address young India even to-day.

It is impossible, my friend, to calculate the amount of mischief which has been wrought in our country by godless education * * * Verily, to this source—to the influence of ungodly education—is to be attributed the want of due progress in the social condition of the country. Witness the numerous improvement societies, friendly meetings, debating clubs, literary associations, etc., whose number is hourly increasing * * * Many and varied are the schemes proposed for the country's good, but hardly do they pass beyond the pales of theory. Social reforms are speculated upon but not practically undertaken * * * True, there are acute understandings and powerful intellects ; true, there are high flights of imagination and brilliant rhetorical attainments; true, there are minds stored with science and arts—but where is the heart to work? * * * Verily, there is a line of demarcation between a mind trained to knowledge and a heart trained to faith, piety and moral courage. Rest assured, my friend, that if in our country intellectual progress went hand in hand with religious development, if our educated countrymen had initiated themselves in the living truths of religion, patriotism would not have been a mere matter of oration or essay but a reality in practice * * * That unity and nationality which is considered a great desideratum would have been established; and our countrymen, consolidated by religious love would have realised all the benefits of united exertions and mutual sympathies, and effectually surmounted many of those difficulties in the way of social reforms which are now considered insuperable.

SPONTANEITY OF PRAYER

In the second tract entitled 'Be Prayerful', he dwells on the spontaneity, necessity and utility of prayer. It is in the form of a dialogue, and in its spontaneity and efficacy it is the same prayer which he clung to all his life :

As I ask mortal man for food because it is essential to the sustenance of my body, so I pray to my God for spiritual blessings which are essential to the sustenance of my soul. In

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both cases a deep want, a pressing and irresistible necessity is the origin of prayer: in neither is there any reference to logic. * * *

If you ask me why I pray to God, I will say—not because logic or psychology teaches me to do so—not because my school master insists on my doing so—but because the deep wants of my soul drive me to the necessity of praying to Him who is my Father and my Friend. And if your profound logicians attempt to deter me from prayer on the ground of what they generally call its philosophical fallacy, I shall say unto them,—'Can ye prevent the hungry from asking for food? Ye cannot then prevent the soul from praying for the bread of life.' * * *

With prayer you must begin religion, with prayer you must continue it. As a nurse prayer fosters and nourishes religion in its infancy; as a faithful friend it encourages and helps it in its manhood; and as a physician restores its healthful tone when it is deranged. So whatever stage of religion we view, we find prayer is essential to it.

SEEING AND FEELING GOD

In the fourth tract—'Basis of Brahmaism'—published in September of the same year Keshub forcefully testifies to the knowledge of God being not an inference, or abstraction, but a direct perception; and speaks of seeing and feeling God, as the true tests of the living religion:

Brahmaism is a living religion. It reveals truth immediately, and with all the vividness and force of direct perception. How animating for example is a Brahma's knowledge of God! He does not seek God through abstractions and generalizations. He has not to carve out his God by the chisel of logic; he does not worship an abstract metaphysical ideal of the Divinity, destitute of charms, and lifeless. Nor on the other hand is his God a historical personage, cognizable through the medium of representation and with the aid of proper evidences—and withal a God "that was but not is". His God is neither a logical nor a historical divinity. His God is an ever-living and ever-present Reality that can be seen and felt. No teacher, no idea, no abstract proposition, no consecrated object acts as a mediator between him and God. He stands before his Father face to face. He beholds Him who is infinite in time and space, wisdom and power, love and holiness, and is at once enlivened and enraptured; then the clouds of doubt fly away, the soul is armed

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with indomitable faith, all the spiritual energies are quickened and love and joy sweeten the heart.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF INTUITION IS LIMITED TO A FEW; BUT INTUITION ITSELF IS UNIVERSAL PROPERTY

He proceeds then to discuss the universality of this direct perception:

True, the philosophy of intuition is limited to a few, for every man is not a philosopher. But intuition itself is universal property; its truths are the patrimony of the human race. * * * Metaphysical training is not an indispensable requisite to the knowledge of truths; scholarship is not the *sine qua non* of admission into our faith. Nature is the preceptor and the guide. The universe is the cathedral, Nature the high priest, every man, whether an illiterate rustic or a profound philosopher, a throned monarch or a ragged clown, a native of Europe or of India, a man of the first or the nineteenth century has access to his Father, and can worship and serve Him with faith and love.

In intensity of conviction and power of spiritual perception the writings of this period on the subject of seeing, hearing and feeling God pre-figure Keshub's famous lecture on God-vision, delivered in the Town Hall of Calcutta four years before his death.

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

In the sixth tract—'Signs of the Times'—Keshub thus portrays the catholic church of the future, supporting himself now and then by extracts from various thoughtful writers of repute:—

Freedom and progress are the watch-words of the 19th century. It is likewise beginning to be felt that true faith does not consist in an intellectual assent to historical events, but in earnest and steady reliance upon the ever-living, ever-present Deity * * * Many an earnest soul is strenuously protesting against the worship of the "dead letter"—antiquated symbols, and lifeless dogmas, and vindicating the living revelations of the spirit within. * * * * * A strong yearning after the living and spiritual is thus clearly manifest. Nor, again, does the controversial and jealous spirit of sectarian

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dogmatism fall in with the catholic views of the age. History has portrayed in frightful colours the mischievous effects of sectarianism, and has fully proved that *opinion* cannot serve as the bond of religious confraternity—that what is local, contingent and specific, cannot constitute the basis of a church. Such a church as stands upon what is above time and place—upon catholic principles of Faith and Love, such a church as shall establish the brotherhood of man, many are looking forward to with eager expectations.

BOOK-REVELATION—SELF-CONTRADICTORY AND SUICIDAL

One of the most important of these tracts, again in the form of a dialogue, is the eleventh entitled 'Revelation' and published in May 1861. It not only excels in the closeness of its reasoning but in the catholicity which it breathes throughout:

We believe that our understandings are not sufficient to give us salvation; and we acknowledge the paramount importance and necessity of a light from on high. We account revelation as the only way through which we come in contact with the saving truths of the spiritual world. The scriptures of all religions are regarded by us as rich repositories of what is noble, pure, and saving; and we accept the truths which are in them with profound reverence, although we do not identify them with revelation. * * * A book-revelation is self-contradictory and suicidal. Revelation is a state of the mind, an actual fact of consciousness. Hence a book-revelation, inasmuch as it is a book, an external object, cannot be scientifically called a revelation. Revelation is subjective, not objective.

REVELATION—SUBJECTIVE NOT OBJECTIVE

Thus if revelation is taken in its primary and literal signification, *viz.*, knowledge communicated by God, it is possible only as a fact of mind, and cannot therefore be identified with books or other external objects, however rich they may be with moral and religious significance. It is altogether subjective, and hence whatever truth remains in an objectified state is beyond its province. The dogma of book-revelation there falls to the ground. If on the other hand revelation is understood in the secondary acceptation, *viz.*, whatever teaches us precious doctrines, and elevates our moral and religious conceptions and feelings, far from being confined to the texts of any particular

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book as the exclusive sacred repository of divine truth, it extends over all books that inculcate truth—nay it embraces the whole universe as a living revelation. Such is our doctrine of revelation.

REVERENCE FOR ALL SCRIPTURES

The doctrine of harmony of scriptures, so inseparably associated with Keshub's maturer teaching, had not as yet made its definite appearance in his spiritual horizon. But there is a spirit of reverence for all scriptures irrespective of creed or country which may rightly be taken to be the earnest of what was to come later:

> It is our duty to kiss and love truth wherever we can find it. O those charming psalms of David that draw tears of piety from the hardest heart and bring relief even unto the most afflicted! How inexhaustible are the riches of the precepts of Jesus! Can any one read them without being conscious that the heart is growing warm with love and the soul strong with faith and enthusiasm? If you have studied the writings of that child of resignation, *Hafiz*, have you not oftentimes felt yourself soaring upon the wings of faith to the regions above, and there drinking plenteously the sweets of God's love in His blissful presence and encircled by His affectionate arms? When the *Upanishads* describe in stirring eloquence the sublimities of the spiritual world, what heart can crawl on the platform of vulgar cares, or forbear feeling the exalted joy and strength of the higher nature. Can it be believed that a heart that lustily thirsteth after wisdom unto salvation would reject or even view with indifference the noble ideas set forth in such books? A prejudice in this matter betrays only a disregard of truth : and a Brahmic heart abhors such a prejudice.

Apart from giving publicity to the subject matter of the discourses held at the *Brahma Vidyalaya*, steps were taken to consolidate the knowledge on the part of the pupils by holding periodical examinations, and awarding certificates of honour to the examinees who gave proof of proficiency. Thus the *Brahma Vidyalaya* laid the foundation for a sound reflective basis of religion, viewed as work and worship, among the young enthusiasts.

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SANGAT SABHA

Equally if not more important, in the life history of Keshub and the country, was another institution started by him about September or October of 1860. If the *Brahma Vidyalaya* was a large study circle meant to be a reflective training ground for the mind and the heart, the *Sangat Sabha* was a closer circle for intimate spiritual fellowship, for mutual interchange of ideas and aspirations. There were no fixed hours, no formalities observed, as for a meeting, or a lecture or a regulated discussion; no choice of set subjects except such as were dictated by the needs of the moment; no restraints, no programme. It was soul-force that brought them together, knit them together and determined the proceedings of the *Sabha*. It was the first nucleus of a true brotherhood. None can estimate the signal services it rendered to the thought-life of the generation. And who that has had the privilege of contact with any one of those consecrated lives can deny the power of true and abiding fellowship? What the Brahma Samaj, nay, what India wants to-day is a true brotherhood, such as that of the *Sangat*, which may yet transmute the base metal of our lives into gold. Let one of those very men testify to the work and worth of the institution:

> It was mainly for religious conversation, though occasionally there was prayer, and the influence it exercised upon the minds and lives of those who attended it was remarkable. Strange earnestness characterised every proceeding; all the members were sturdy young men, steadfast followers of Keshub, the quintessence of the Brahma School, where he lectured, and the old Good Will Fraternity. They met frequently, and with fiery zeal of self-reformation, laid bare their whole hearts, freely and frankly discussed their own faults, courted mutual aid and criticism, and under Keshub's guidance made most genuine progress in spiritual and moral life. Hunger and fatigue seemed to have no power over them. They sat up the whole night, from the evening to the morning twilight, in Keshub's room in a corner of the large family house of the Sens of Colutola, comparing experiences, practising penitence, making resolutions, offering prayers. They were, as if apart

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from, and above the rest of the world, themselves and their youthful leader their own world. They were young men fresh from the Colleges, the hope of their parents, the source of support to their families, and their guardians and friends took considerable alarm at their indiscreet enthusiasm. But in them Keshub found congenial spirits; he magnetised them; they magnetised him; and together they formed a nucleus of organisation out of which the best materials of Keshub's subsequent movements were supplied.[1]

The Good Will Fraternity, the *Brahma Vidyalaya*, the *Sangat Sabha* were not mere expressions of a desire to organise institutions. They were more than that. They were a part of his being. They grew as he grew. It was not given to him to grow alone, isolated. He was destined to draw others unto him and daily grow with them in stature. His unfoldment was the unfoldment of others along with him, and theirs his. They were indeed mystic fraternities "face answering to face—heart answering to heart." These societies were only the fore-runners, in his youth, of many others that followed in due course later in life. All these sprang into being at the call of the Spirit whom he saw, heard and felt within himself, read in the hearts of his fellow devotees, in the society round about him in the history of nations, and in the universe of Nature outside. With Keshub nothing mattered but the voice and the vision of God. The whirlwind of activities which swept over his life at different stages were but the natural manifestation of his inner life. This new vision of life as an entirety was his mission to hold up before the world. The infant societies were only so many instruments in ushering in the New Age, the New Ideal, the New Dispensation yet in the making. Call them youthful efforts, early strivings after self-expression, whatever you like, but read them as a part and parcel of his being; and then alone does his whole life present itself as a continuity, full of meaning to the country and the world at large. His ardour for national unity, national education, political freedom, social re-

[1] P. C. Mozoomdar in *Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, pp. 84-85.

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generation, economic uplift, emancipation of women, demolition of caste and sectarianism—took colour from the New Ideal which steadily dawned upon him. Religion was nothing apart from all these, never a mere abstraction. These were to him the very flesh and blood of religion. To practise this living, loving religion what man needs is purification, so that with heart undefiled, and with its inner light undeflected, he may serve God and man. Hence, as with the Puritan Fathers of old, conscience and consecration became the watchwords of these mystic fraternities and enthusiasm the very garment of their faith.

PHILANTHROPIC EFFORTS—THE FIRST YOUTH MOVEMENT

In the first quarter of the year 1861 came the terrible famine that devastated large tracts of Upper India. Could Keshub's wakeful nature fail to seize this opportunity for service? He organised a regular campaign. The little community was thrown into a ferment of feeling and philanthropy. At his instance a special famine relief service was held in the Brahma Mandir. Devendranath with his scrupulous regard for details signalised the occasion with great demonstration and with a soul-stirring address. The men of the *Sangat Sabha* and allied organisations—each did his own part to the best of his ability. They begged for alms at every door. The poor helped with their mite. The women parted with their jewels. It opened the door to all-India philanthrophy. Nothing progresses like progress. In November of the same year when there was another visitation, this time nearer home, in the shape of a fever epidemic which devasted Lower Bengal, the memorable address which Keshub delivered excited a volume of public sympathy. The enthusiastic work of co-operation that followed for the relief of the distressed will testify to generations to his reality as a man of action. We see therein the beginnings of the first youth movement in India harnessing all the ardency and enthusiasm in the country to the noble cause of relief.

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KRISHNAGAR CAMPAIGN

Amid these various activities he visited Krishnagar. It was primarily a pleasure trip taken for recoupment of health. But it turned out to be a missionary expedition. His fame as a brilliant *extempore* speaker had preceded him. Krishnagar accorded him a cordial welcome, and expressed its eagerness to hear his message. It had a distinguished tradition for learning and literature. Nothing was more welcome to Keshub than to be an instrument in creating a centre of influence there. He delivered a number of addresses on a variety of subjects: Basis of Brahmoism, repentance and salvation, the aim of life and the necessity of prayer, sacrifice for God's sake. *Extempore* lectures were quite a new departure in the line of missionary propaganda. With Keshub it was the only method possible. He could never speak from notes, far less read a written discourse. Words came to him in such ceaseless torrents and clothed with such heavenly fire that they fell like thunder-bolts on the auditory. His lectures made a profound impression on the learned and the unlearned of Krishnagar. Incidentally, Rev. Mr. Dyson felt that he could not afford to let the message of the Brahma Samaj go unchallenged. He thought fit to deliver counter-lectures. Keshub took up the gauntlet. Who could be more reverential to Christ than Keshub? But he attacked the lifeless dogmas of Trinitarian orthodoxy and like a young lion tore them into tatters.[1] The Christian missionary felt his own discomfiture and retired from the field.

How did Keshub sum up his experiences at Krishnagar? With the lesson of love. Towards the close of a written report of his work there, which he submitted to Devendranath, he characteristically opens his heart thus: "The conviction is getting rooted in my mind that Love stands first and foremost among the means of propagating the Brahma faith. A missionary that hath no love is worth nothing. Love lends patience and enables one to bear hard

[1] Keshub's replies to Dyson's questionnaire formed his tenth Tract and was published in April, 1861.

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KESHUB IN 1859

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words, insults, ridicule and persecution. Love enables one to cast away self-consciousness, anger, and pride and to bend in humility before the rich as well as the poor. Love enables one quickly to bring round the truth-seeker, to vanquish the enemy, to attract and steal the hearts of all. At this moment what we need is a number of (true) missionaries. We must train up some without delay. * * * God is the propagator of his religion. He is the Preacher. We are only instruments in his hands."[1]

SELF-CONSECRATION

"Whatever he thought in his mind," said Devendranath of Keshub, "he had the power to express in speech. Whatever he said, he had the power to do. Whatever he did, he had the power of making other men do." Nothing was truer of Keshub. The thought that was now uppermost in Keshub's mind was what he expressed in the above short report of the Krishnagar expedition, dated May 12, 1861, sent by him to Devendranath. The need of the hour, he felt, was a band of men thoroughly consecrated and wholly devoted to the work of national rehabilitation. No half-measures could ever fill his mind. In God's vineyard, half-hearted love, half-time work were to him unthinkable. There is a tide in the affairs of life and he believed that for him the tide had come. As this feeling grew and grew on him, he began spontaneously to give expression to it. But it was contrary to his nature to preach a thing without practising it. Thus it appeared clear that the moment had arrived for him to give up every other vocation, and to devote himself wholly and solely to the service of God and man. Since November 1859 he had been employed in the Bank of Bengal, now the Imperial Bank of India. His pay was not large to begin with, but his prospects were undoubted. His personality and talents had already attracted the attention of the Bank authorities, who were not unaware of his additional claims to recognition by

[1] Translated from *Acharya Keshub Chandra*, First Part.

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reason of the distinguished services rendered to the Bank by his ancestors. But nothing weighed with Keshub. Once his mind was made up no advice, remonstrance or expostulation from friends or relations was of any avail. Just at the threshold of preferment and prosperity, on the 1st of July 1861, Keshub resigned his post in the Bank of Bengal. It was the Inner Voice again that prevailed. In Keshub's generation, such sacrifice and renunciation was unknown and was the first of its kind. But it was by no means the last. As his biographer puts it: "One act of true renunciation provokes a hundred others. The men of the *Sangat* soon began to take counsel who should follow Keshub's foot-steps, and devote themselves to the service of the Church. One after another began to take leave of secular life, till the Brahma Samaj came to possess a powerful body of apostolical workers, all in the prime vigour of life, consecrated with their families to self-sacrifice, determined to spread the spirit and principles of Hindu Theism by ceaseless labours throughout the land. The most momentous results have followed such enthusiastic propagation. Keshub's true leadership has been the leadership of such men; his real ministry has been to form the characters, and shape the destinies of such men."[1]

THE INDIAN MIRROR

In August 1861, Keshub started the *Indian Mirror*, then a fortnightly newspaper. Among other co-adjutors of Keshub in this undertaking was Monomohan Ghosh, later well-known as one of the leading members of the English Bar, and one of the foremost citizens of Calcutta. The only other English newspaper under Indian editorial control and management at the time was the *Hindu Patriot*, which accorded a warm welcome to the *Indian Mirror*. The *Mirror* had a distinguished career. Started as a fortnightly,

[1] *Life and Teachings*, Navavidhan Trust edition (1931), pp. 85-86.

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ENTED

Miss Elisabeth Sharpe

Miss Sophia Dobson Collet

PRESENTED
ESENTED

Miss Mary Carpenter, 1870

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it subsequently became a weekly, and in 1871 it became the first Indian daily paper in English. It fully justified its name. The old files of the *Indian Mirror* show that whatsoever was goodliest and best in India's thoughts, aspirations and efforts was reflected in its columns, and for a considerable number of years it continued to shape and prepare public opinion for the national reconstruction in progress. Not only Keshub himself but his friend and fellow-worker Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar and some time after his accomplished brother Krishna Behary Sen and his talented cousin Narendra Nath Sen (who, subsequently, joined the Theosophical Society) must be gratefully remembered as builders of its reputation. This was the first of a series of journalistic enterprises, to be mentioned later, that came each in its proper time, each having a character all its own.

SCHEME OF NATIONAL EDUCATION AND REFORM

Apart from his multifarious duties as the Secretary of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj, and his work as teacher, lecturer, tract-writer, editor and missionary, Keshub was quietly elaborating in his mind a comprehensive educational programme. He could not carry it out in all its details till some years after. But he was firmly convinced that the way to regeneration of the masses lay through extensive education, carefully adapted to the requirements of different classes of recipients. Anxious to establish contact with free-thinkers and philanthropists in other lands he opened correspondence with Francis William Newman, Miss Frances Power Cobbe and other theists and publicists in England. Keshub proposed a simultaneous agitation in England and India for educational reform, so as to impress on the Government the urgency of certain radical changes in the educational machinery of the day. Mr. Newman wrote a brochure making an appeal to the British people and Keshub himself inaugurated the agitation in India. The first broad outlines of his programme he foreshadowed before a meeting of the Brahma Samaj which he specially convened for this purpose in October 1861, in the Brahma

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Samaj building. He pleaded for the sovereign necessity of leading an all-round life of thought, feeling and action, of meditation, devotion and service, and the urgent need of spreading education far and wide with a view to national reconstruction. If Brahma *dharma* was the religion of love, he said, then it must be realised that it could not consist of a mere bundle of beliefs, or a passing rush of good impulses. Nor could it exhaust itself in empty praise of God in the Mandir. It must become the sovereign law of life and bear abundant fruit in acts of service. It must invigorate the body, inspire the soul, and fire the will for serving those around. It must naturally manifest itself in initiation of movements of reform all along the line, and in co-operation with existing movements of reform wherever found. It would not do to depend on Government for help in every particular. Must they even bake our bread and cook our food? Self-help and self-reliance must be the watch-word for all workers. They had only to be conscious of the fact that they were workers in God's vineyard, and the strength born of faith would be theirs immediately. He indicated three main lines of work: first, radical reformation of the prevalent system of education, divesting it of mere memory work and cram, and stressing the education of the heart as well as of the mind. Secondly, the education of the lowlier classes. Education should not be the monopoly of the rich and the prosperous. Of what avail would it be if education merely touched the surface and left the bulk of society in darkness? How would the barriers of caste be broken unless education were thrown open to all, irrespective of so-called rank and respectability? Thirdly, spread of education among women. The country could never prosper unless and until the light of education penetrated the zenana. Educate the men as you might, the women folk, if left uneducated, would always be a drag on society. Women must first be rescued out of their deplorable condition before salvation could come to India. In this lecture we find the broad outlines of the problem of education as conceived by Keshub Chunder Sen as far back

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as 1861. Three quarters of a century have passed since and why is it that we find ourselves faced to-day by the self-same problems? The remedy is as far from us as ever. We still sit like children in the market place, peevishly grumbling, 'We have played unto you and ye have not sung; we have piped unto you and ye have not danced'. Schemes and projects too numerous to mention have come and gone but the solution of the problem of education is not in sight. Is it not because we have tried only to water the branches leaving the roots of the tree of life neglected? Let Keshub answer:

> To live religiously is to live naturally: to live naturally is to act up to the dictates of conscience. To live to nature is to live to God. *There can be no corruption in the nature of man as created by, and coming directly from, the hands of God.* Our impurities are not God's creation but the creation of our free will; and unreasonable is it to charge nature, and thereby nature's God, with sins of our own doing. Man is destined by Providence to pursue the path of virtue and truth: not to pursue it is unnatural.
>
> Man's destiny, then, is to attain God, or make progress unto Him. Progress or development is the end of our being. This is the true vocation or mission of man in this world. Every man is thus a missionary. We have been sent to this world with a mission sacred and solemn, for the proper discharge of which we are accountable to Him Who hath sent us. * * * * *

UNTOUCHABILITY

"There can be no corruption in the nature of man as created by, and coming directly from, the hands of God." What a terrible indictment on the so-called doctrine of untouchability! If only this truth was realised by the nation and its lesson accepted as the basis of action the problem of untouchability would be instantly solved. No half-measures, no coquetting with caste, no cajoling with orthodoxy. The futility of the half-measures is being proved everyday. Despite the infinite solicitude and sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi, the age-old and decrepit *Varnashrama*

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dharma[1] rises again and again phoenix-like out of its ashes, and flaps its wings with new life and vigour at every re-birth. And on the other hand, we behold the spectacle of religion being dragged into the mire of political diplomacy. The leaders of the so-called 'untouchables' threaten and say, "Give us a weightage, or a handsome majority or else we embrace Islam, or Sikhism, and thus secure political ascendency." As if religion is a pawn in the game of politics! Keshub Chunder Sen from the early age of twenty-two raised a solemn note of warning against prostituting religion, or denying it its natural function as the foundation of social and national reconstruction. He was deeply convinced that in view of India's past, her genius and traditions, she could hope for no social or political regeneration unless it were through a movement having for its basis a genuine moral and religious consciousness. Life, individual as well as national, must be viewed as an integral whole and progress must mean progress of that whole through natural spiritual unfoldment:

> But this progress must be of the whole life: we must seek the development of the whole man. All the compartments of life must advance in the way of truth: all the powers and sentiments of the mind must be cultivated and developed. In whatever way we choose to divide life, the principle for which we are contending remains unaffected: all the ideas and energies of which we are possessed, must be duly cultivated; the neglect of any one of them is so much departure from our destiny. This normal development of the whole man—this "one continued growth of heavenward enterprise," is the true destiny of human life. Our progress must also be ceaseless and constant.

[1] *Varnashrama* is the institution of caste based on the economic principle of hereditary persuasions, such as the *Brahmin* or the sacerdotal caste, for religious ministration, the *Kshatriya* or the warrior caste, for protection of the realm, the *Vaishya* or the commercial caste, for trade and business, and the *Sudra* or the servitor caste, for menial service. With the impact of Western civilization and under *Pax Britannica* this system has now become obsolete and any revival of it must be in the nature of an anachronism.

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There is a unity in religion which, however our wishes may incline and theories dictate, can never be fractioned. Religion is not a thing of "shreds and patches". It is one indivisible unity which, if you seek to have it, must be sought in its entirety and fulness. To be religious in the morning but not in the evening; to be religious in seasons of prayer alone, but not in practical life; to be religious in special conditions of life, is to have the shadow of religion—not the reality. Religion is not confined to the heart or the intellect; it pervades the whole life and enters into every creek and corner of its varied details, illuminating and ennobling all its thoughts and feelings, its words and actions.*

Did Keshub ask for too much? Would it not have been expedient for the moment to have put aside the claims of conscience, and come to a compromise with orthodoxy? Would it not have been more practical on his part to have kept religion separate from social reform—to have suffered a severance between the realms of worship and of work? Instead of throwing himself right out of the pale of orthodox society, why did he not remain within it by compromising a few of his principles, so that a few others might find acceptance with the parent community? These questions have again and again been asked. But expediency and policy have no place in the logic of conscience. No real progress or reconstruction has ever been achieved by moral compromise. What is more, expediency has been tried and found wanting. Later events in his own life would show that the prudent among his co-adjutors who held back in alarm saying 'Thus far and no further,' and took to the path of compromise with orthodoxy, came utterly to grief. Keshub knew one way, and that was to listen to the Inner Voice. In unessentials, he was always prepared to allow for peculiarities of tastes and for unmeaning, if harmless, social rites and customs. But in essentials he would have no compromise. Hence Keshub from the outset set his face against a separate secular movement

* Lecture on 'The Destiny of Human Life,' January 11, 1862—*K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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of reform. He definitely took his stand on establishing the equality of man *on religious grounds* and for making a frontal attack on all manner of inequalities and iniquities thriving under the sanction of so-called religion. Far from making a covert approach, he declared the line of his attack from the house-tops. Here is an instance:

Hence social reformation must be based upon religion. It is true that the reformation of social customs and usages may, to a great extent, be accomplished independently of religion; but it is not true that social reformation can be thorough and complete without religious advancement. Religion, by improving the mind and investing conscience with supreme authority, lays the axe at the very root of corruption, whether in the individual character or in the institutions of society. It is futile to attempt to reform society thoroughly so long as prejudices lie deep in the heart of the nation. Social reformation must therefore be preceded by and based upon religious reformation. This has been adopted by the Samaj as the main-spring of all measures of social reform. The Hindu meets his religion at every turn. In eating, drinking, moving, sitting, standing he is to adhere to sacred rules, to depart from which is sin and impiety. Under such circumstances, how is it possible to overthrow all the social evils of Hinduism, when faith, in its authority, is suffered to reign undisturbed in the heart? The Samaj does not seek to destroy caste as an institution distinct from Hinduism, by setting up a purely secular movement to oppose its laws and principles. It seeks to establish the equality of man on religious grounds, and thus indirectly abolish caste distinctions. It wages a purely religious war with all evils, theological and social.

The thorough reformation of native society is the object of the Brahma Samaj. It proposes not merely to destroy the superstitious foundation and all superstitious appendages of Hindu society, but likewise to give it a re-organisation upon the basis of pure faith, and adorn it with useful institutions. In regard to caste, for example, the destructives represent it to their minds as a horrid institution apart from Hinduism and direct their attention and energy to its abolition. Let members of different castes promiscuously dine in public, let them subscribe their names to a covenant and pledge themselves inviolably to ignore the distinctions of caste in all that

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BANARAS

they do; such is their plan of operation. "The constructive policy is—bring all men within the bosom of One Church, under the feet of One True God, the Universal Father of all: community of interests and feelings will keep up social fellowship, and caste will naturally perish in the uncongenial atmosphere of religious brotherhood,—destroy caste but construct brotherhood.[1]

While pleading, however, for the primacy of conscience and faith Keshub always recommended the middle path that steered clear of dangerous experiments, on the one hand, and cold calculating timidity, on the other. "We must neither rush impetuously into dangerous experiments of social innovation, nor must we yield ourselves wholly to the cold calculating policy of the time-server." Again and again, while leading the vanguard of progress in regard to education and emancipation of women, we find him resorting to this middle path and avoiding dangerous exotics, so that the progress of education might, in his own words, be "at once natural and national". It was to no small degree from amongst his own followers, imbued with the spirit of Western manners and customs, that he received the bitterest opposition to "the natural and national" programme which alone he was prepared to sponsor.

If the lectures made the public declarations of principle, there was the *Sangat* for coming to practical decisions. It formulated the code of conduct to be followed. In due course, the *Sangat* laid down what would then be regarded as a most revolutionary code: Caste must be given up; so must every badge or mark savouring of idolatry or caste; the sacred thread, denoting superiority of man to man must be abjured; no countenance must be given to the dancing of public women (*nautches*); all members must practise strict temperance, impart to their women-folk the light of knowledge and religion they had themselves received, make their wives true partners in life, and be scrupulously clean and

[1] Lecture on *Social Reformation in India*—Feb. 21, 1863.

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honest in their dealings with neighbours. It was not a mere paper code,[1] but was carried out with strictness and punctiliousness such as would recall the memory of the Puritan Fathers of old. As a natural consequence, the members proceeded to discard the sacred thread and one after another made short shrift of it. When *Acharya* Devendranath saw the resolution, he looked at his own sacred thread and said 'why, then, this must go' and promptly discarded it. The elderly members of the Samaj, prudent and pusillanimous, were little prepared for such a catastrophic change. But the broader mind of Devendranath had already turned over and examined the position which was fast arising. He evidently preferred to go with Keshub and the young enthusiasts, as far as he could. His sympathies hitherto were definitely with Keshub and the progressives. In 1861, Devendranath solemnised the marriage of his second daughter strictly according to unidolatrous Brahma rites. The ceremony based on Vedic texts was framed by Devendranath himself and the charge to the bride and the bridegroom was added by Keshub. Thus under the sunshine of the *Acharya's* approval Keshub felt that his ideal of national reform and reconstruction was well within reach.

THE ORDINATION

It was a wonderful five-year-plan of Providence (1857-1862)—the period of his preparation for ministry. With prayers and penitences, vows and sacrifices, work and worship, with educational, philanthropic and journalistic efforts the five years passed like a whirlwind. In April 1862, Devendranath sprang a surprise on every one, including Keshub, by his announcement of Keshub's ordination as *acharya* on the first day of the Bengali Shakabda 1784 (13th April, 1862). With the exception of Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish—in earlier days and

[1] Published towards the close of 1861 under the caption *Brahma Dharmer Anusthan.*

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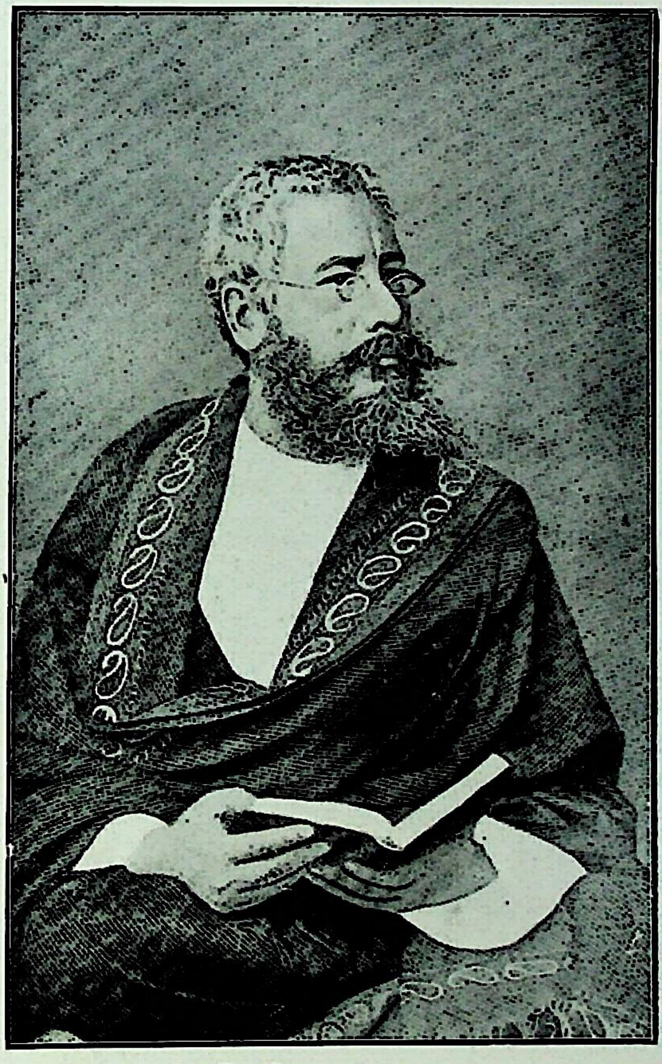
ENTED



THE PRADHANACHARYA

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under entirely different circumstances—no one had before been installed as *acharya* (minister) of the Brahma Samaj. They were all *upacharyas* (sub-ministers) under the venerated Devendranath who was the *acharya*. Moreover, the idea of a non-Brahmin minister bore on its face the mischievous portent of a radical change of outlook. Was the Calcutta Brahma Samaj to depart from the even tenor of its life and take to a course all but revolutionary? Whence this suddenness? This is how the Maharshi himself accounted for it:

> I had pitched my tent at a place called Ghuskara, not far from Burdwan, in a mango grove, containing thousands of trees. It was about mid-day. And there the voice came to me saying "Appoint Keshub the minister of the Brahma Samaj. The Samaj shall grow and prosper under him". I returned to Calcutta and determined to make the appointment. The elderly Brahmas entreated me not to do this. They said, "Appoint him *upacharya*, do not appoint him *acharya*." Keshub Babu was not prepared for this honour. But the voice of God came to me, I had received the inspiration, and I determined to act accordingly. Such leadings (*chalana*) I have often received during the progress of the Brahma Samaj.

And so preparations were set on foot for the grand occasion. Devendranath did nothing without bestowing attention on every detail. The installation took place in the family mansion of Devendranath at Jorasanko. It was a long and impressive service ending with a charge to Keshub by the *Pradhanacharya*[1] who presented him with the insignia of office framed in gold on which his duties and responsibilities were set forth in beautiful language, the document being signed at foot by Devendranath himself. The title *Brahmananda* (Rejoicer in God) had already been conferred on him. The appointment brought great rejoicings to the younger section who looked upon Keshub

[1] Chief Minister. This was the title by which Devendranath came thereafter to be known. It was decided upon at a meeting convened on the 8th April, 1862, immediately before Keshub's ordination as minister.

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PRESE

as their natural friend and leader. To Keshub the recognition was a matter of deep thankfulness. It came to him as a divine benediction on his efforts.

THE SECOND TRIAL

Great as was the event, taken by itself, it was destined to become greater by the trial of faith that went with it. The day of his ordination proved to be the day of his excommunication. Keshub was determined to bring his young wife to the Jorasanko house to take part in the divine service on that momentous occasion. The angry patriarchs of the Colutola family would not have it. They had already put up with a great deal of insubordination, as they thought, on Keshub's part. But they set their face resolutely against this fresh outrage on decency and orthodoxy. Keshub was inexorable. Quietly, but with infinite firmness, and in the presence of the crowd of forbidding relatives the young couple left the family mansion and proceeded to their destination. "He had that about his face", observes Mozoomdar, "which on great emergencies compelled immediate obedience." And so he triumphed. A word must be said here of the little girl-wife who thus stood by Keshub's side in this ordeal and faced it with admirable courage and trust. Little did she know then that she was performing the first rite of *yugal-sadhana* of which she and Keshub gave such a splendid example later in life! This was only the beginning of that life of struggle and endurance which they were destined jointly to lead. Throughout Keshub's trials and successes she stood by her husband's side, co-operated with him in trust and veneration, faithful to the last. And when the day of bitter parting came, who knew better than she did that Keshub had only passed from glory to glory! At the conclusion of the ordination ceremony, he received a letter from his irate uncle purporting to forbid him from entering the family dwelling-house which he had disgraced by his insubordinate conduct. With the doors of his own house thus closed against him, with the love and ministration of his beloved mother and

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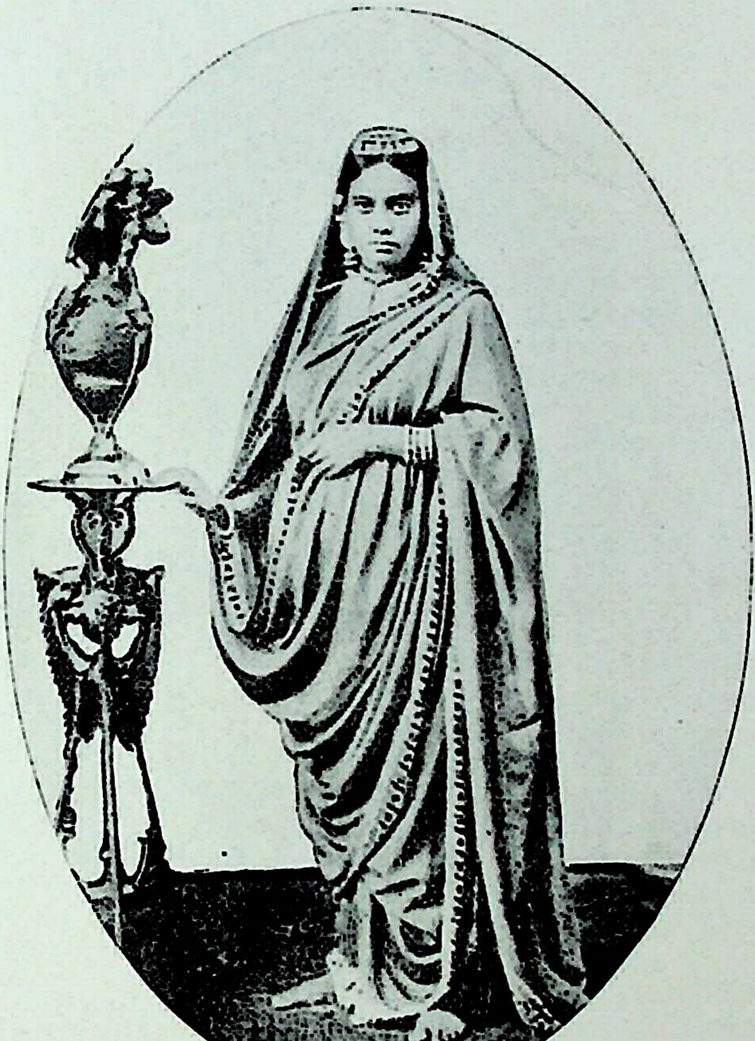

Jaganmohiny Devi

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brothers cruelly denied him, with the withdrawal from his reach of every help and every comfort, Keshub launched upon his ministry naked of all worldly resources, clothed with the vestments of poverty and privation. But what he lost for the time being was more than made up for by the fond fatherly affection of Devendranath who at once warmly received Keshub and his wife into his household. There they stayed for months without being made to feel for a moment that they were strangers. The sons of Devendranath were more than brothers and the daughters received Keshub's wife with open arms into their midst as one of their very own. The relationship thus established proved life-long and never-to-be-forgotten. Keshub, however, was visited with a prolonged and painful illness which kept him bed-ridden for months. At times, there was great anxiety felt about his recovery. It was not till the end of the year that Keshub could be taken to a rented house near his family dwelling-house where his mother could come and offer him her loving ministrations.

WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE NEW BRAHMA SAMAJ

This act of Keshub, taking his wife to the Jorasanko house to be by his side on the day of his ordination, is symbolic of the new ideal of the future Brahma Samaj. Hitherto woman had occupied none but a subsidiary place in the Brahma Samaj. She had not come into her own. This threw open the gateway of fuller life to womanhood, and has since, through Keshub's organised efforts and by definitely marked stages, enabled the daughters of India to participate in the larger life of the world to which they are by birth-right entitled.

THE BRAHMA SAMAJ VINDICATED (1863)

The year 1863 opened propitiously. Reinstated in his family dwelling-house, restored to all the rights and privileges there as an independent member, his disputes with his uncle over his affairs amicably settled, Keshub once more threw himself with all the enthusiasm of his nature into the

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work that lay before him. On return to his house his first act was that of the Brahma householder to celebrate the *jât-karma* (thanks-giving ceremony on the birth of a child) of his first-born, Karuna Chandra. It was performed with unidolatrous Brahma rites, of course, and with due pomp and circumstance.

One of the notable events of the year was the controversy with Christian propagandists about the faith and principles of the Brahma Samaj. Keshub, always reverential to Christ, and friendly to messengers of Christ in all their efforts after public weal, had had no occasion since the Dyson controversy to pick up the gauntlet thrown by them. Meanwhile the Brahma Samaj, through the personality of Devendranath and Keshub Chunder, had attained a prominence and popularity which to the less thoughtful of the Christian missionaries appeared detrimental to their cause. This found expression through the writings and speeches of Rev. Lal Behari Dey, an Indian Christian convert and a *Padre*—"one of the first fruits of Dr. Duff's labours". He started a weekly journal, the *Indian Reformer*, and in its columns opened a bitter campaign of ridicule and raillery against the faith and philosophy of the Brahma Samaj. Indeed, he utilised the press as well as the platform for the purpose, and challenged Keshub to defend the Brahma Samaj if he could. Thus lectures and counter-lectures followed in quick succession with the result that the Brahma Samaj emerged out of it not only amply vindicated but considerably reinforced in power, influence and popularity. The lecture that he delivered in April, 1863 entitled 'The Brahma Samaj Vindicated' was not only a masterpiece of oratory but, in closeness of reasoning, dignity of expression and the breadth and catholicity with which it was inspired, stands to this day unparalleled in the literature of controversy. It should be read in entirety in order to form an estimate of the earnestness and thoroughness with which Keshub set about refuting the charges brought against the Samaj. It was after this lecture, to which Dr. Alexander Duff listened intently, that he made the famous

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observation: "The (Brahma) Samaj is a power and a power of no mean order—in the midst of us."[1]

BRAHMA BANDHU SABHA (1868)

(Society of Theistic Friends)

In the same year, 1868, was established the Brahma Bandhu Sabha (Society of Theistic Friends) with the five-fold object of—(1) forming a bond of union amongst the Brahma Samajes at various places (there were forty-one Samajes at the time) and thus co-ordinating the methods of mission work to be adopted—(2) printing and publishing suitable books and pamphlets for the welfare of women—(3) promoting general welfare, establishing Brahma schools, organising lectures and publishing books and tracts; also addresses in simple language for the edification of the general public in the town and countryside—(4) establishing dispensaries for medical relief—(5) publication of suitable books on the Brahma *dharma*. Keshub had already started and was carrying on the Calcutta College on approved lines for the moral and intellectual education of young men. The present activities of the Samaj were more particularly directed to the welfare of women, so as to make them realise the supreme position of importance and usefulness they enjoyed in the social and religious reconstruction in progress. A suitable syllabus of studies was drawn up for promoting and assisting the education of girls at home, so that those who were not in a position to avail themselves of the education imparted in the few girls' schools which then existed might still not have to go without any education at all. Another syllabus was prepared for elderly ladies and measures were taken to offer them facilities for carrying on self-education. It was before this society that Devendranath delivered his famous address entitled 'My experiences of twenty-five years in the Brahma-Samaj' which is indeed the first connected account of the development of the Samaj from the earliest times to the year 1864.

[1] 'Christian Work for July'.

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IV

VISION OF A LARGER RECONSTRUCTION

(1862-1866)

In the midst of all these activities, there was dawning upon Keshub, clearer and clearer every day, the vision of a wider and larger Brahma Samaj. Intensely national and liberal-minded as he was, the Brahma Samaj of his conception fast outstripped the confines of Bengal and we find him again and again, in his utterances pointing the path to a greater Theism for all India—a National Religion, a National Church. Nay more. The vision of a Universal Church of catholic Theism rose before his eyes, such as would make the whole world united at the footstool of God. Its forms of expression, its modes of realisation would be different with different peoples—would be National—but the eternal verities on which such brotherhood was based would ever remain Universal. From the earliest days of his ministry this dominating idea continued to determine his conduct and career. It gained in vividness and precision as time went on. But the essential idea was there from the earliest days of his ministry. As early as 1862 we find it clearly expressed in the sermon delivered by him on the occasion of the thirty-second anniversary of the Brahma Samaj. "The Brahma Samaj," says he, "will unite the East and the West, the North and South."[1] In his famous prayer at the special family service held on that occasion, at the Jorasanko house of the Tagores, he thus expresses it: "Our hope that all the world will be united as one family can never be in vain. Gradually family with family will unite till all families will merge in one. In God's Kingdom there can be no two families—all will become one. It is only the beginning of it to-day in Bengal."[2]

[1 & 2] See *Acharya Keshub Chunder* in Bengali by Upadhyaya Gour Gobinda Roy (Part I).

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This idea of building up God's undivided family was predominant throughout, along with the idea of breaking down portions of the old structure, as a preliminary. The latter comprehended various items, such as breaking down barriers between man and man; removal of caste, untouchability, disabilities of all sorts; overpowering sectarianism etc., all these being only means to the sovereign end of constructing a wider and wider family. Were these ideas favoured by the *Pradhanacharya*? There can be no doubt that they were, up to a certain point. Much more in his private letters of this period than in his public utterances, we find his entire approval of the reformative idea. Thus on the 7th Asarh, 1783 (A.D. 1861) he writes: "It seems proper now to devise means for having inter-caste marriages validated by legislation."[1] On the 25th Bhadra, 1783 (A.D. 1861) in a letter, which should be read and re-read by every sincere lover of reform, he observes, "There is no doubt that legislative recognition must be sought for the rites of Brahma marriage, but even if that cannot be obtained, where is the harm?"[2] On the 13th Magh, 1783 (A.D. 1861), he again writes, "There are no distinctions of caste among the *Brahmas*. There can be inter-marriage between Brahmins and Sudras"[3] (the highest and the lowest of the two original castes). In fact, more than one inter-caste marriage was solemnised in the Brahma Samaj, if not with the *Pradhanacharya's* active participation, at least with his tacit approval. At the same time Devendranath never made a secret of his fundamental principle that the Brahma Samaj must never go outside the pale of the Hindu community but must initiate and extend reforms from within the Hindu fold. The clash between Keshub and Devendranath which, shortly afterwards, led to their unavoidable separation was the natural consequence of a clash between

[1] *Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore* (Biography in Bengali by Ajit Kumar Chakravarty, 1916), p. 339.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 328-329.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 363.

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these two opposing principles. Those that favoured the latter principle had to turn their backs at reforms for the sake of remaining within the parent community. Those that whole-heartedly favoured reforms and reconstruction were, much against their will, thrown clean out of Hindu society by the indignant orthodoxy of the day.

TOUR IN MADRAS AND BOMBAY

At this juncture in February, 1864 Keshub conceived the idea of coming into direct personal contact with other parts of India and as a beginning started on a tour through the presidencies of Madras and Bombay. He sailed from Calcutta on the 9th February and reached Madras on the 14th where he made a few days' stay making the acquaintance of the leading people and discussing with them the possibilities of establishing a Society on the lines of the Brahma Samaj in Madras. His lecture at the Pacchayyappa's Hall, on 'The Duties and Responsibilities of the Educated in Madras', which was attended by almost all the enlightened and influential Indians, and a fair number of Europeans, made a profound impression and they called him the Thunderbolt of Bengal, marvelling at his eloquence and earnestness. Some of them strongly insisted on his remaining on in Madras for a while to "put the stones together" of the great social edifice he exhorted Madras in his lecture to build. Keshub was unable to stay as he was bound for Bombay. But we find the following interesting entry in his Diary of 26th February. "I have every reason to hope that if a man, sufficiently qualified, lives among the people as a missionary for sometime, his labours will be crowned with success. * * * Some one must lead, the multitude will follow. Let the Brahma Samaj extend her mission, and all India will follow,"

From Madras to Bombay. All opportunities were afforded him for coming into contact and exchanging ideas with all sections of the community. He lectured in the Town Hall and in the Framji Cowasji Hall, conducted divine service, held discussions and impressed

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upon all the need for immediate and earnest action. His lecture on 'The Rise and Progress of the Brahma Samaj' was attended by all the notabilities of Bombay and was deeply appreciated. The influence of his eloquent appeals and his genuine efforts at constructive work in Madras and Bombay did not remain restricted to those towns only. It permeated all parts of the Peninsula, for every newspaper gave them due publicity. The *Madras Daily News*, the *Madras Observer*, the (Madras) *Athenaeum*, the *Nilghiri Excelsior*, the *Bombay Gazette*, the *Times of India* (Bombay), the *Native Opinion*, the *Bombay Saturday Review*, the *Indu Prakash*,—all took up the cause and declared their conviction that the time was opportune for making a real move in the direction of reform and re-construction as pleaded by Keshub. Thus the planting of reform strongholds in Bombay and Madras now became a mere matter of time. On return home Keshub's idea of an all-embracing, all-India National Church became a vivid and vital part of all his teachings and programme of work.

PRATINIDHI SABHA

One of his earliest measures was in October 1864 to organise the *Pratinidhi Sabha* (Representative Society) with a view to consolidate the Samajes scattered all over the country with no common tie. In his opening address at the inaugural meeting he clearly laid down, as the first principle—the watchword, so to say, of the Society—the independence and autonomy of every unit. But with due regard to freedom of thought and action there should be uniformity in certain matters and there should be every endeavour by means of faith and love, and mutual inter-change of ideas and aspirations, to cement the Samajes into one large body. This should be done by and through one central tie of representation, so that the representatives of the different organisations might bring all questions of common requirements and common aspirations before the Society for a united solution. The Society should promote mission work; organise social and educational reforms; and

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should be united by co-ordinated work for the improvement of women, for spread of education among the masses, for removal of caste distinctions and superstitions, for purifying marriage customs and the like. Devendranath, who presided over this inaugural meeting, was elected President of the Society, and Keshub the Secretary. Thus the *Pratinidhi Sabha* started under the joint auspices of Devendranath and Keshub with the object of serving as a powerful auxiliary for carrying out and propagating reform in the land by a grand united effort. Keshub also started in October of this year the *Dharmatattwa*, the well-known Bengali fortnightly which is functioning to this day and which together with the *Indian Mirror* did yeoman's service to the cause of reform during this momentous period.

THE SEPARATION

As time passed, however, it became increasingly clear that the two parties in the Brahma Samaj—the conservatives and the progressives, the old and the young—could hardly pull together any longer. The following year brought matters to a crisis. The causes that brought about the separation are thus set forth by the *Pradhanacharya's* son, Satyendra Nath Tagore:—[1]

> As regards social reformation, he (Devendranath) was for adopting a slow and cautious policy, a policy of conciliation; he was in favour of leaving such reforms as were really required to the influence of time, and to the effect of the teachings of a pure religion. Keshub, on the other hand, was a reformer of a more pronounced type. Though for many years he had sat at the feet of the Maharshi, a time came when he could no longer pull together with his conservatism. Inter-marriage, re-marriage of widows, abolition of caste distinctions, all these questions of radical reform were started and discussed. On these questions, it would seem, my father yielded as far as his conservatism would permit, but when he thought that Keshub's disciples were going too far, he drew back in alarm. Then,

[1] *Autobiography of Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore*, translated from the original Bengali by Satyendra Nath Tagore and Indira Devi, Macmillan & Co., 1916. See Introduction by Satyendra Nath Tagore, pp. 14-17.

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again, there were other differences between the two. My father, as I have said, was intensely national in his religious ideal, whereas Keshub's outlook was more cosmopolitan. While not exactly denationalised he was better fitted by his training and education to assimilate the ideas and civilization of the West. Indeed, his whole character was moulded by Western culture and Christian influence. He drew much of his spiritual store from the New Testament in a manner which made his missionary friends cling to the hope of his conversion to their faith. In 'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia,' a lecture delivered in April, 1865, Keshub says: "I cherish the profoundest reverence for the character of Jesus, and the lofty ideal of moral truth which he taught and lived. In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity, but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible. To us Asiatics, therefore, Christ is doubly interesting, and his religion is entitled to our peculiar regard. And thus in Christ, Europe and Asia, the East and the West, may learn to find harmony and unity." These utterances, though of a date subsequent to the separation, are sufficient to show his attitude towards Christianity, in marked contrast to my father's. A struggle between two such temperaments and such opposite ideas was bound to end in disruption and matters soon came to a crisis. * * * The mutual love between the Pradhanacharya and Brahmananda delayed the catastrophe. But as no compromise was possible between the two, separation was inevitable. In February 1865 Keshub finally withdrew from the parent church: in the following year he sent a parting address[1] to my father, and established the Brahma Samaj of India. On the secession of Keshub's party my father gave his own church the name of 'Adi Brahma Samaj.'

The above is a pre-eminently fair and unvarnished representation of the contrariety of temperaments and the conflict of ideals which led to the separation of the two leaders Brahmananda Keshub Chunder and Maharshi Devendranath. The one was ardent, impetuous, ever-advancing—he would venture forth into unknown regions of thought and activity; the other was quiet, cautious, afraid of the new and the unknown. The one would consolidate the old and the new; the other would fain conserve the old.

[1] In this for the first time Keshub and his co-adjutors appropriately addressed him as 'Maharshi' by which name Devendranath has reverently been called ever since. The formal establishment of the new Brahma Samaj took place at a meeting held on the 11th November, 1866.

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The one viewed life as a whole and refused to draw the line between work and worship; the other would keep worship on a plane all its own, and let social custom and convention primarily determine the duties of life. Keshub's indomitable spirit would not let him rest within the fenced acreage of caste and sectarianism; the Maharshi's repose of soul would not let him face the clash of arms, or the din of controversy involved in the revolt against caste, creed and convention. Keshub would go forth to all ages and climes, to all cults and cultures in quest of truth and light; to the Maharshi India alone sufficed for all purposes. Keshub was national as well as international; the Maharshi was intensely national—for him nationalism was all in all.

It is refreshing to contemplate how, although they parted from each other, the two leaders maintained their spiritual friendship unimpaired to the very last. A year and a half before his passing, Brahmananda, broken down in health and suffering from a painful and wasting malady, wrote to Maharshi from Simla:

> Bless all India that they may have the privilege of rejoicing in Brahma. Now that your soul is steadily rising heaven-ward, do keep the faithful (*Bhakta-mandali*) bound to you with ties of love so that they may also rise with you.[1]

Maharshi's reply holds up a beautiful picture before the world of their mutual relationship:

> The response that I have received from you, I have never received from any one else * * * Long ago did I name you Brahmananda; even now I receive response (proof) of it. Nothing is lost on you. What an auspicious moment was it when I came to be united with you! Many an unpropitious event has not been able to snap the bond asunder. It is to you that God has entrusted the duty of keeping the faithful (*Bhakta-mandali*) bound together. You have been bearing that burden with joy, indeed you are inebriated with that work. Nothing else has any taste for your palate. God has not kept you in need of anything. Even as a *faquir* you are performing work that the wealthy (alone) can do.[2]

[1 & 2] Maharshi's Autobiography in Bengali, edited by Priyanath Shastri (1898), Appendix, pp. 25-26.

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But even the above pales into insignificance compared to the glow of love and pride with which Maharshi wrote of his Brahmananda in the year 1881 to Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar:

Some honour him (Keshub), others censure him; but in honour and dishonour, in praise and blame, he remains firm and absolutely devotes his life to the progress of the Brahma Samaj. In the palace of the prince and in the cottage of the peasant he enters like the sunbeam, and spreads the light of religion. As long as he disseminates God's religion and as long as he sings His glory, so long is his life; and even death will be dear to him for the sake of truth. His powers are like the glory of the mid-day sun; but his cheerfulness, his gentleness, his piety brighten the beauty of his face. That handsome face is still a living reality in my heart. If in my mind there lives the image of any man, it is his image. His whole form, from the peculiar manner in which he dresses his hair to the bright nails on his feet, at this moment, even as I write this letter, appear in my mind like living realities. If for any one I have shed tears of love, it is for him * * * In the love for our country we have felt the desire of wisdom to be satisfied by what our own Rishis have taught. But he, inspired with a love catholic and extraordinary, has prepared himself to bring about a reconciliation between the monotheists of India and those of Arabia and Palestine.[1]

The very last of Maharshi's letters arrived only three months before the call came to his beloved Brahmananda from the other world—arrived like the last benediction:

By His grace have you received the sight celestial. Your wisdom is wonderful. Your words are wonderful. May you live long preaching the sweet name of Brahma to all.

And after Brahmananda had been taken from him by death and some friends went to condole with him, it was thus that the Maharshi addressed them:

When I had him near, I considered myself the master of all the wealth which the kings of the world could command.

[1] Biography of Maharshi Devendranath in Bengali by Ajit Kumar Chakravarti, p. 594.

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When I sat up with him, often till one or two in the morning, conversing with my departed friend, I never perceived how the time passed. The union between our souls is never to be destroyed.

WIDER HORIZONS

The year 1865 opened with a wider vision of religion. In the anniversary sermon delivered by Keshub on the 23rd January, he struck a universal note when he said:

> Our cathedral is the universe, our object of worship is the Supreme Lord, our scripture is intuitive knowledge, our path to salvation is worship, our atonement is by self-purification, our guides and leaders are all the good and great men. In this catholic Brahma *dharma* there is no trace of sectarianism, no cause for dissension. It is the property of all, hence it is not a sectarian body. It belongs to all those who, as worshippers of the One True God, will love Him and do the work He loves.

Then came the momentous event in February—the definite separation of the progressives from the conservatives. Various endeavours were made to find out ways and means for continued work as a united body, to bring about a *rapprochement*. Months passed but all efforts failed. In July, 1865 before a distinguished audience Keshub delivered an address on "The Fight for Religious Freedom and Progress in the Brahma Samaj" in the hall of the Calcutta College. It lasted for about three hours and set out in great detail the causes and the real nature of the inevitable conflict which had arisen in the Brahma Samaj. It was a masterly defence against the charge of internecine quarrel which was expressly or impliedly being hurled at the two opposing sections, and it succeeded in rallying the friends once again round its banner. Besides this, there was a volume of literature in the *Indian Mirror* on the subject from Keshub's pen which kept the public intelligently informed of the fact that it was not a mere quarrel but a conflict of ideals and principles. An opportune article from his pen in the *Indian Mirror* (fortnightly) of 1865 testified in glowing terms to the indebtedness of Theism in India

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to the life and example of Devendranath.[1] Meanwhile, mission work proceeded apace, more educational institutions sprang up, tracts and pamphlets multiplied. There was no end of activity. In the autumn of 1865, Keshub founded the Brahmica Samaj (Association of Ladies), the first of its kind. This was destined to play a distinguished part in the new Brahma Samaj to come. In October, accompanied by Aghore Nath Gupta and Vijoy Krishna Goswami, he went on a missionary tour to East Bengal in the course of which he visited Faridpur, Dacca and Mymensingh. This tour made a very deep impression and gave a tremendous impetus to the cause of Theism in East Bengal.

TRUE FAITH

The journey to East Bengal was mostly by river in slow boats. It was while travelling from Faridpur to Dacca in one of these boats that he composed the remarkable booklet entitled 'True Faith.' It is said to have been meant for a guide to missionaries, but it is a record of his highest spiritual experience, and lays down standards of apostolic zeal and rectitude which will endure for all time and for all manner of men. It is in fact a summing up of the principles of high spiritual living.[2]

JESUS CHRIST, EUROPE AND ASIA

In May 1866 Keshub made an announcement of a lecture to be delivered by him in the Medical College Theatre (Calcutta) on 'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia.' The announcement was somewhat startling. The Brahma Samaj up to that time had had very little to do with the founder of Christianity. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahma Samaj, had no doubt been greatly influenced by Mahomed and Jesus, and he never failed in his writings to acknowledge them as great teachers of humanity. But apart from his personal indebtedness to them, he never

[1] 'The Brahma Samaj or Theism in India', *Indian Mirror*, 1865.
[2] Miss Collet observes, "It resembles the mediæval mystics in its beatific vision of God."

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sought to introduce their teachings into the literature, or worship, of the Brahma Samaj. Indeed, there was no occasion for him to do so. The Brahma Samaj had not developed in his time into a community, or a body of worshippers. As for the form of worship, such as it was, it drew upon the Vedic and the Vedantic sources alone. The homage and reverence Ram Mohan paid to the person of Christ as a great man, the ample space it filled in his life and the larger humanity he envisaged under the influence of Christ, gradually came to be forgotten in the Brahma Samaj. The name of Christ became an anachronism, nay, an anathema. Why resurrect him? Keshub was firmly persuaded that within the larger Faith and Family of the new Brahma Samaj there was room for Christ, need for Christ. Indeed, there was room for all great men, need for all the 'elder brothers of humanity'. It was, therefore, with a profound consciousness of the need of the hour that he delivered the two memorable lectures in 1866—'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia' in May, and 'Great Men' in September. These endeavoured to plant the Brahma Samaj on a higher and wider platform of humanity whence the vision of universal religion would become a concrete fact of spiritual experience. They opened up vistas of unknown possibilities of spiritual companionship and culture. But, on the other hand, they gave the handle for much misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

As regards the first lecture 'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia' it may broadly be divided into several themes. First, it dealt with the character and career of Christianity in the East and in the West, its many vicissitudes, its abuses and excesses under exceptional conditions, its underlying essence that time or circumstances cannot destroy, its wonderful effect on Christendom. Secondly, it dealt with the inescapable personality of Jesus Christ. Surely, said he, Jesus is above ordinary humanity. Thirdly, it dealt with a topic which came in appropriately at the moment as an urgent matter of socio-political interest. One R. Scott Moncrief, a Scottish merchant of Calcutta, had in a

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public lecture traduced the character of the Indians, not even excepting the gentler sex. The excitement and resentment of the Indian public knew no bounds. As feelings had been worked up to a high pitch of rancour and race-hatred Keshub felt that nothing could heal the wound better than by a frank and outspoken protest. How in making this protest he poured oil over troubled waters by invoking the aid of the Prince of Peace can only be appreciated by reading the lecture from beginning to end. It was a scathing but dignified protest, a trenchant yet truthful portraiture of the blemishes of the Indian and the Englishman, and a most powerful appeal to the Christians in India to be true messengers of the Prince of Peace. After reviewing the growth and progress of Christianity in the East and in the West, not excluding from mention its many aberrations and excesses, he thus expressed his homage to the greatness of its founder:

> Tell me, brethren, whether you regard Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenters' son, as an ordinary man. Is there a single soul in this large assembly who would scruple to ascribe extraordinary greatness and supernatural moral heroism to Jesus Christ and him crucified? * * * * Blessed Jesus, immortal child of God! For the world he lived and died. May the world appreciate and follow his precepts!

He then passed on to the topic as to what influence Christ and Christianity should have on the Indians and the Europeans who have met together on the soil of India.

> I shall now proceed to discuss its ethics in its application to, and bearing upon, the character and destinies of the European and Native communities in India with a view to draw certain wholesome lessons of a practical character for their guidance, and for regulating and adjusting their mutual relations. In handling this rather delicate part of my subject, I must avoid all party-spirit and race-antagonism. I stand on the platform of brotherhood, and disclaim the remotest intention of offending any particular class or sect of those who constitute my audience, by indulging in rabid and malicious denunciations on the one hand, or dishonest flattery on the other. * * *

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But does harmony actually prevail among us? United by political ties, are we morally united? Does brotherly love subsist between the conquering and conquered races? Do the former recognise Jesus as their guide and master in their dealings with the latter, and exercise on them the influence of true Christian life? Are the Europeans and the Indians so far influenced by the love of God and man which Jesus Christ preached, as to combine harmoniously to promote their mutual welfare and fulfil the purposes of Providence? Alas! instead of mutual good feeling and brotherly intercourse, we find the bitterest rancour and hatred, and ceaseless exchange of reviling, vituperation, and slander. * * *

I regard every European settler in India as a missionary of Christ, and I have a right to demand that he should always remember and act up to his high responsibilities. But alas owing to the reckless conduct of a number of pseudo-Christians, Christianity has failed to produce any wholesome moral influence on my countrymen. * * * Behold Christ crucified in the lives of those who profess to be his followers!

I hope, therefore, that European and Native communities will understand aright their respective defects and short-comings, and the good qualities of each other, that they may with humility and mutual respect cultivate fellowship with, and do good to, each other. * * *

What follows is of supreme interest not only by reason of the view of Christ which it presents as being an Asiatic but also on account of the fact which it discloses that Keshub by a gradual but natural process of expansion has now come to think and speak of his own nationality as being not only Indian but Asiatic.

If, however, our Christian friends persist in traducing our nationality and national character, and in distrusting and hating Orientalism, let me assure them that I do not in the least feel dishonoured by such imputations. On the contrary I rejoice, yea, I am proud, that I am an Asiatic. And was not Jesus Christ an Asiatic? Yes, and his disciples were Asiatics, and all the agencies primarily employed for the propagation of the Gospel were Asiatics. In fact, Christianity was founded and developed by Asiatics and in Asia. When I reflect on this, my love for Jesus becomes a hundredfold intensified; I feel him nearer my heart, deeper in my national sympathies. Why should I then feel ashamed to acknowledge that nationality which he acknowledged. Shall I not rather say he is more congenial

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and akin to my Oriental nature, more agreeable to my Oriental habits of thought and feeling? And is it not true that an Asiatic can read the imageries and allegories of the Gospel, and its descriptions of natural sceneries, of customs and manners, with greater interest, and a fuller perception of their force and beauty, than Europeans? In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible. To us, Asiatics, therefore Christ is doubly interesting, and his religion is entitled to our peculiar regard as an altogether Oriental affair. The more this great fact is pondered, the less I hope will be the antipathy and hatred of European Christians against Oriental nationalities, and the greater the interest of the Asiatics in the teachings of Christ. And thus in Christ, Europe and Asia, the East and the West, may learn to find harmony and unity.

GREAT MEN

In the controversy with Christian missionaries in 1861 and 1868, Keshub Chunder Sen appeared as the defender of Natural Theism against dogmatic Christianity. There can be no doubt that his personality and persuasive eloquence effectively stemmed the tide of conversion of educated Indians to Christianity, which was then at its height. Apart, however, from dogmatic Christianity, Keshub's reverence for Christ as a great man was unbounded. For the broadening of individual, social and national outlook, for the upbuilding of national life on the broadest lines, Keshub felt that a closer contact and companionship with great men was fraught with momentous significance. It was for this reason that in his lecture, 'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia,' he spoke on the sublimity of the life of Christ, and on the principle of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation of which it was a crowning example. While, however, speaking of Christ and Christianity, a subject large enough by itself, he could not within the limited time cover the much larger field as to great men in general. He had to leave a great deal that was uppermost in his mind unsaid at the moment, and to reserve it for independent treatment at a later date. Meanwhile, a controversy arose as to the exact position which Keshub had assigned to Jesus Christ and other great men. On the

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one hand, a particular section accused him of having gone too far towards hero-worship. On the other hand, another section accused him of not having gone far enough towards Avatarism (incarnation). Seventy years have passed since and much that was then misunderstood and misinterpreted now stands clarified and illuminated by Keshub's later lectures, sermons and writings which form a treasure-house of knowledge on great men. With a view to the uprearing of individual and national life on universal lines Keshub was not content with a mere intellectual appreciation of great men as historic characters. He felt that a spiritual assimilation of their lives as facts of consciousness was needed. For this purpose later in life,[1] he practised and prescribed for his immediate friends and co-adjutors a form of spiritual culture known as *Sadhu Samagam* or 'Pilgrimage to saints and prophets'. By close study, meditation, introspection and prayer these devotees sought within their hearts to commune with the departed saints and prophets—nay, the messengers of truth and light in every sphere of life. The life and personality of Moses, Socrates, Buddha, the Hindu Rishi Fathers, Jesus, Mahomed, Chaitanya thus formed the subject of special study and contemplation and were followed up by those of Faraday, Carlyle, Emerson and the like. Though of later date, the following passage is typical and truly represents Keshub's views about 'great men' as early as 1866.

> As pilgrims we approach the great Saints and commune with them in spirit, killing the distance of time and space. We enter into them and they enter into us. In our souls we cherish them and we imbibe their character and principles. * * * If they are not personally present with us, they may be spiritually drawn into our life and character. They may be made to live and grow in us. This is a normal, psychological process to which neither science nor theology can take exception.

In order properly to appreciate the exact import of his teachings on the subject it is necessary to turn to a few of the pregnant passages in the Lecture.

[1] In 1880.

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What part do Great Men play in the economy of our lives and souls? Are they of any spiritual importance to us?

Yes, they are of the deepest interest and importance to our souls. They are destined to subserve the most momentous purposes in the moral economy of all men, of whatever race, or country, or age. With what is purely personal, local, and contingent in them we have certainly nothing to do; but that which is divine and universal in them, that which makes them great men, deeply concerns us all, for it is God's gift to us. * * * * We cannot dishonour or trifle with them; we cannot dispose of them as mere great historic characters with empty praise and admiration; we must regard them as God's manifestations to each one of us, and so open the whole heart to them, that it may be filled with all that is great, noble, and divine in them.

Then the speaker proceeds to delineate the constitution and function of great men and their place in divine economy from which is deduced our relationship with them :—

It is God's light that makes them shine, and enables them to illumine the world. He puts in their very constitution something superhuman and divine; hence their greatness and superiority. They are great on account of the large measure of divine spirit which they possess and manifest. It is truè they are men; but who will deny that they are above ordinary humanity? Though human, they are divine. * * * *

The doctrine of Divinity in humanity is nothing new. It is a tragedy that it should be encrusted with superstition and should be fruitful of nothing but multiplication of deities in the already overcrowded pantheon of mythology. What Keshub does is merely to lift the veil of mystery and superstition that enshrouds it and get at the essence :—

True incarnation is not, as popular theology defines it, the absolute perfection of the divine nature embodied in mortal form; it is not the God of the universe putting on a human body—the infinite becoming finite in space and time, in intelligence and power. It simply means God manifest in humanity—not God made man, but God in man. * * *

But in speaking of divinity in humanity, does Keshub mean that it is restricted only to great men? He declares in unequivocal terms that the manifestation of God in

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humanity is universal. What then is the difference between ordinary humanity and great men?

For it must be admitted that every man is, in some measure, an incarnation of the divine spirit. The constitution of man is of a composite character; it is on the one hand gross, carnal, and earthly; on the other, holy, spiritual and heavenly. It is a strange combination of the lusts of the flesh and the divine instincts of the soul. Do we not feel that, though we are made of dust, there is within us something which is not of this earth, which is immortal and holy, born of heaven and destined for heaven? Are we not all conscious that, however sinful we may be, God dwells in each of us, inherent in our very constitution? "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" * * * *

If, then, incarnation means the spirit of God manifest in human flesh, certainly every man is an incarnation. And great men are pre-eminently so, for they exhibit a larger measure of the divine spirit. They are singularly brilliant manifestations of that Eternal Light which all men in some measure reflect.

Thus, if great men are above ordinary humanity, they are not above, or beyond, the laws of nature. They are not miracles, and if they are miracles they are only greater miracles than ordinary men. The fact that great men appear under the operation of natural laws is only another way of saying that they appear under the dispensation of Providence, that their life and work are but a fulfilment of one increasing Purpose which unfolds itself with the process of the suns and through the history of nations.

In the established economy of Providence they are special dispensations, to meet the pressing wants of humanity. Hence their appearance is not a mere accident, a casual phenomenon, but the sequence of a regular and constant law which regulates the moral interests of mankind. Their birth is always the result of a deep and irrepressible moral necessity. Wherever and whenever peculiar circumstances demand a great man, the very pressure of that demand drags him forth perforce. In God's moral government, to feel a want is to get the thing needed.

Keshub then passes on to consider the representative character of great men. If they are the result of a deep

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and irrepressible moral necessity, is it possible that that necessity should be of an abstract character, void of all contact or connection with the generation in which they are called to work? Certainly not.

Great men possess a representative character. They are representative in a double sense: They represent their country and age. They represent specific ideas. This quality is essential to greatness.

* * * *

They represent only their own people and their own age. A prophet is, in fact, the highest embodiment of the spirit of his country and time—the leading type of contemporaneous nationality. In him the people recognise their truest representative, and they spontaneously and trustfully throw themselves on his guidance. Nay, they often find that he understands them better even than they, and enters more deeply into their wants and wishes.

* * * *

Great men are representatives in another sense: they represent particular ideas. Every great man comes into the world with a certain great idea fixed in his mind which it is his mission to realise and stamp on his age. * * * It is the governing principle of all his thoughts, wishes, and aspirations; the primary motive of all his movements. He lives in it and for it. His life is identified with his idea: his existence has only one meaning—the development and realisation of his idea.

* * * *

The lives of all such prophets are accepted reverently as God's Revelation in History; various and different they may be in their peculiar features and local adaptations, yet as regards the universal and eternal principles they represent, they are parts of the same divine economy, and subserve, more or less, in the hands of God, the same grand purposes of revelation and redemption. Each of the prophets came into the world as a messenger of God, bearing a distinct message of glad tidings which he contributed to the cause of religious enlightenment and progress. We must then freely honour all of them, and gratefully accept from each what he has to deliver instead of binding ourselves as slaves to any particular person as the only chosen prophet of God. For at sundry times and in divers manners God spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets.

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Let sectarianism perish, then. Let denominational and geographical boundaries be for ever forgotten, and let all nations unite in celebrating a universal festival in honour of all prophets, regarding them as the Elder Brothers of the human race.

UNIVERSAL INSPIRATION

The lecture on 'Great Men' is of abiding interest for another reason. It gives a lucid exposition in masterly language of another principle on which Keshub laid stress throughout his life, namely, the universality of inspiration—the naturalness of seeking and finding guidance direct from the Ever-present Guide. There must be no mediator, nothing to stand between God and man. In this lecture he viewed the revelation of God in its threefold aspect—the revelation of God in Nature; the revelation of God in history, being the mode in which God manifests His purpose and sends His message of saving grace through great men; thirdly, inspiration or God's revelation in the soul. "The highest revelation, then," says he, "is inspiration where spirit communes with spirit face to face without any mediation whatsoever." That he definitely claimed this 'the highest revelation' to be accessible to all and not restricted to a few only, is clear from the lecture on 'Great Men,' and also from his anniversary lecture of 1873 on 'Inspiration'. Indeed, between 1865 and 1884 almost every public or private utterance of his on the subject, whether in English or in Bengali,—nay, his whole spiritual outlook—was imbued with the idea of Inspiration and its concomitant, namely, the abnegation of the self and its subordination to the Purpose of the Greater Self. Let us turn to a few of the key passages in order to understand the exact ambit of the doctrine and of the meaning and function of Inspiration in spiritual life:

Nothing can bear comparison with the almighty power of Inspiration—the direct breathing of God's spirit—which infuses an altogether new life into the soul, and exalts it above all that is earthly and impure. It is the more powerful, being God's direct and immediate action on the human soul, while the revelation made through physical nature and biography is

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indirect and mediate. In these latter modes of divine manifestation truth is received at second hand; God is seen as reflected in a mirror, and often, alas! refracted through its imperfections. Divinity is represented in the world of matter—in flowing brooks and stupendous mountains in the radiant sun, the serene moon, and the vast starry convex; it is also represented in the thrilling precepts and the quickening deeds of great men. But in inspiration the Supreme Soul is presented to us in our finite souls and His saving light falls directly upon the eye of faith. * * * The highest revelation then is inspiration, where the spirit communes with spirit face to face without any mediation whatsoever.

As inspiration is the gift of divine grace, it is not the proud heart that can claim it, but the humble, prayerful, seeking, striving soul alone that may deserve it:

Divine life can only be secured by divine grace—it comes pouring into the soul from Him who is its source. This is inspiration, it is the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It is God's free gift, not man's acquisition.

This is true spiritual baptism—baptism, not with water, but with fire.

* * * *

Is it true that inspiration is altogether unattainable by men and women in this age, and that we must drink of the dry wells of theology, while our ancestors drank of the Living Fountain of eternal life? Against this anomaly the entire economy of Providence solemnly protests.

* * * *

Our God lives—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. We do not and cannot believe that the God of the modern world is a sleeping or a dead God. No, He lives. He is always I AM. 'In Him we live and move and have our being'—is as true of men to-day as it was in ancient times.

Prayer and Inspiration are only two aspects of the same spiritual phenomenon:

Prayer and inspiration are the two ends of the axis round which, I may say, the sphere of man's spiritual life revolves. They are only two sides of the same fact. Man prays and God hears; God speaks and man listens and obeys. Again, man speaks and God hears.

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True prayer is not the language of prayer. It is not words, it is not bodily posture. When properly analysed it will be found to represent simply a peculiar attitude of the soul—a Godward attitude, a heavenward attitude. True prayer is the unexpressed and hidden spark of heavenly aspiration which rises in the soul and is seen only by God Almighty. The unspoken language of true prayer no ear hath ever seen. An attitude of reverent humility and self-consecration, an attitude of child-like trust and meekness, an attitude indicative of a deep consciousness of weakness and a strong sense of the necessity of Divine aid—such an attitude is prayer.

* * * *

Directly the soul assumes this position towards heaven, directly it comes into this latitude and longitude of the spiritual world, the rays of the Eternal Sun of Righteousness fall upon it and enlighten it. Thus are prayers offered, and thus they are granted.

* * * *

Where there is prayer, there must be inspiration; where man cries, God's inspiring voice is sure to be heard.

* * * *

If such be the object and the end of inspiration it must be frustrated unless God should vouchsafe to inspire mankind eternally and universally.

* * * *

Hence the need of universal inspiration.

* * * *

The effect of inspiration is to merge the human will in the Divine will:

For then self is completely lost in conscious godliness, and you feel that you can do nothing of yourself, and that all your holy thoughts, words, and actions are only the breathings of the Holy Spirit. So the great prophets of earlier times thought and felt. They felt strong in God's strength and pure in God's purity; and to Him they ascribed all honour and glory. Not an iota of the truth they taught or practised did they claim as their own. Do you consider this to be arrogance? Is it pride thus to put on Divinity? Assuredly not. It is the very reverse of pride. Self-assertion is certainly ambitious. But self-denial argues nothing but humility. To think of my truth, my righteousness, is arrogance and pride; but we see unfeigned lowliness and meek humility in him who, however truthful and righteous he may be, takes no credit unto himself, but believes that all that is good in him is the Lord's.

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There would have been no occasion for these long excerpts but for the fact that it is necessary to lay bare before the reader what actually was Keshub's teaching, and even what exactly was the vehicle of language through which the doctrine as to Great Men and the doctrine of Inspiration were expounded and inculcated.

THE BRAHMA SAMAJ OF INDIA, 1866

Informed by this new spirit of catholicism, the new Brahma Samaj took birth on the 11th November 1866. Its membership included every race and community, all men and women who might wish to join it. Its scriptures comprehended, besides the Hindu *Shastras* which had hitherto been the sole repository of wisdom for the Brahma Samaj, all that was to be found for spiritual sustenance in the Qoran, the Bible, the Zend-Avesta, the Granth Sahib—indeed in all scriptures of all nations and ages. An anthology of sayings culled from various scriptures was published under the title *Shloka-Sangraha* (collection of texts) for devotional purposes. A motto in Sanskrit was composed by Pandit Gour Govinda Roy embodying the wider ideal in the following terms: "The wide universe is the holy temple of God; the pure heart is the shrine for pilgrimage; truth is the scripture everlasting; faith is the root of all religion; love is the supreme spiritual culture; self-sacrifice is the true renunciation;—so declare the Brahmas." With this all-embracing catholic view of individual and national life and with his little band of self-consecrated workers, Keshub started on his new career of Re-construction.

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V

THE 'BHAKTI' OR DEVOTIONAL MOVEMENT

(1867-1869)

After the actual separation from the parent Samaj a sense of desolation overtook the seceders. They wandered homeless. The loving ministrations of the Maharshi, his quiescent soul-filling spiritual presence, his spoken and unspoken sympathy for strugglers, his tender care and guidance, all seemed to beckon them home again—to the place of their nurture. It was a great trial, this breaking off from old moorings, this casting adrift on the sea of the unknown. To some of the little group of workers it brought doubt and despondency, to others petulance and pride. Perhaps they felt that they had achieved something; they had made history. Had they not scored a moral victory? Had they not broken caste? Had they not stormed the strongholds of orthodoxy and sectarianism? Had they not earned the honoured name of 'progressives'? Were they not out now to conquer? The eagle-eyed Keshub saw in all this the setting in of spiritual drought and danger. Keshub's mind at this stage is vividly portrayed in a letter that he wrote to one of his fellow-workers:

> The convictions we so valued before regarding the efficacy of prayer, good company and counsel, and the special dispensation of God, generally in history and particularly in the Brahma Samaj, are, it seems, gliding away; and scepticism, once master of the heart, will speedily effect the consummation of that dreadfulness of demoralisation which pride has begotten.

But Providence in His own time brought the transformation, the utter conversion of the heart which was so greatly needed. It was the hunger and thirst after true life that prevailed again over doubt and despondency. Mozoomdar thus portrays the radical change that came over Keshub's devotions at this juncture:

> Keshub's prayers had undergone a strange development during the last eighteen months. The stern ethical and

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intellectual utterances thawed into a tenderness of humility, supplication and trusting dependence which dissolved every heart it touched into kindred tears. The didactic devotions of the old Jorasanko pulpit were by an unseen process transformed into an all-piercing pathos and unspeakable sympathy with every form of sin, suffering and desertion.[1]

This was the beginning of what is known as the *Bhakti*, or Devotional Movement in the Brahma Samaj. Hitherto the Samaj had had nothing to do with the personality of Shree Chaitanya, the prophet of inebriated Love or *Bhakti*, nor with his gospel. Vaishnavism had had no charms for it. In fact, the Vaishnavas had gone down in the estimation of the educated and the enlightened, and for valid reasons. Their doctrines, disciplines and devotions had degenerated into crude sentimentalism and had come to be regarded as a debased form of religion. The catholicism of true Vaishnavism had also suffered destruction in their hands for, quite contrary to Shree Chaitanya's precept and practice, the Vaishnavas had re-introduced caste-barriers within the Vaishnava fold. Yet the undying essence of Vaishnavism was not extinct, and the prophet of Navadwip is ever an unseen power beckoning pilgrims to *Bhakti*-land. The Brahma Samaj, the resort of the young, the educated, and the enlightened, now came under the spell of his personality, and with all the earnestness of their nature the young enthusiasts threaded the paths that led to *Bhakti*. They recked not respectability, so-called. In pious trust and humility they embraced the true spirit of Vaishnavism, even adopting its externals—the unfashionable plebeian forms of devotion—which made their own characteristic appeal to their thirsting souls. The *San-kirtan*, the *Khole*, the *Karatâl*, the *Ektârâ*,[2] were introduced, and these evoked unexpected

[1] *Faith and Progress of the Brahma Samaj* by P. C. Mozoomdar, p. 212.

[2] *San* means together and *Kirtan* means singing praise. *Sankirtan* is a kind of enthusiastic 'singing together' or choral singing. *Khole* is an elongated earthen drum suited to the class of hymnal praise known as *Sankirtan*. *Karatals* are a pair of brass cymbals used as an accompaniment in *Sankirtan*. *Ektara* is a one-stringed instrument which accompanies the voice in a monotone in devotional singing.

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response and enthusiasm. For the first time in November 1867 the whole day *Brahmotsav* (spiritual festival,—literally, festival in God) was held wherein the hours of the day were spent in divine services, prayers, *sankirtans* and *sangat*. Thus through Keshub the Brahma Samaj of India now entered on a distinct phase of development which turned its members from free-thinkers and reformers into devotees, from seekers after truth to suppliants for the grace of God. For this modern revival of Vaishnavism, purged of its abuses and corruptions—with its face turned away from crude sentimentalism and towards the realism of devotion which combines *Bhakti* with *Jnâna* and *Karma* —India is indebted to the spiritual genius of Keshub Chunder Sen.[1]

On the 24th January 1868 (11th *Magh*) was laid the foundation stone of the new *mandir* of the Brahma Samaj of India. This was signalised by enthusiastic street-singing (*nagar-sankirtan*); and in words which have since become classical, the newly composed hymn for the occasion blazoned forth the catholic ideal of the future: "All men, all women are entitled to the same privileges. Those that have *Bhakti* (Love) shall find salvation. There is no distinction of caste (or race)."

Originating in 1867, the *Bhakti* movement gradually advanced till it reached its climax in 1868 at Monghyr, a picturesque and historic town on the banks of the Ganges, where there was a religious upheaval. Its salutary effects were at the moment somewhat marred by some excesses on the part of some of the enthusiasts. Nevertheless, it left its abiding impress not only on the Brahma Samaj but also on other religious bodies. Even the Indian Christian community, later on, adopted *Sankirtan* as a suitable form of devotion, not to speak of *Harisabhas*, *Kathakatas*, and diverse other varieties of kindred congregational devotion

[1] So, Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar in a recent article in *Roy's Weekly* (July, 1937) on Chaitanya and his teachings: "There is no doubt that a sudden accession of strength was received by Vaishnavism from a very unexpected quarter, namely, the Brahma movement of Keshub Chunder Sen."

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which were revived all over Bengal. However much these revivals may have departed from the strict lines indicated by Keshub, there can be no doubt that he may justly be regarded as the inspiring genius of present-day Vaishnavism in Bengal. The good that the *Bhakti* movement did to the Brahma Samaj, in particular, and through it to the Hindu community at large, is well brought out in an impartial estimate of it by a contemporary European critic, and we make no apology for giving an extract from it below:

Now there can be no doubt that the *Bhakti* movement, from which all these developments in a great measure proceeded, unlocked the deepest fountains of religious life that have characterised the Brahma Samaj, and that the rise and progress of that movement at that time, saved the progressive party, and virtually the Brahma Samaj itself, from ultimate dissolution. But it was not in the nature of things that so emotional a movement in so susceptible a race should be without its weak side also. How much of the marvellous unsealing of religious life then manifested was owing to the unique personality of Keshub Chunder Sen, it is not necessary to determine, but he was certainly felt (and doubtless truly so) to be the chief leader and sustainer of that movement. Unfortunately, some of those who owed him intense gratitude on that account did not always express it discreetly. The common Oriental custom of prostration before superiors came into vogue towards Keshub among a small circle, and although he repeatedly expressed his disapproval and dislike of it, some time elapsed before the practice died out, and meanwhile it was taken up (in October, 1868), by ill-informed and hasty critics, as denoting personal adoration of Keshub as a "new deity", and he was accused of claiming the honours of divine incarnation. The cry of 'Keshub-worship' rang far and wide, causing the intensest pain to the object of the calumny—a calumny which, to his pious and humble soul, was the most horrible that could have been devised. At last, however, its utter falsehood has been so frequently exposed that I need not devote any more space to this worn-out absurdity.

The *Bhakti* movement also excited strong disapproval among the conservative Brahmas, whose religion was inevitably of a different type; while some of the more secularistic among the progressives also, thinking that too much stress was given to spiritual life, and too little to social reform, held somewhat

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aloof from the movement. Such inequalities of development are inevitable in a young church and can easily be apprehended by readers acquainted with Christian history.[1]

Another testimony from one who was in the thick of the Monghyr upheaval, as well as in the controversy which followed, will show how great was the felt power of *Bhakti* in the Brahma Samaj. Says Pandit Bijoy Krishna Goswami about twenty years after:

> At this time there opened an auspicious era in the Brahma Samaj. On the 9th Agrahayan Shak 1789 (A.D. 1867) was celebrated the first *Brahmotsav*. How may I describe it? 'The earth is like unto Heaven, man becomes divine,'—this is what I then realised. Many a time did I feel as if in worshipping the supreme Brahma our voice mingled with that of the gods. * * * His (Keshub's) sweet sermons and personal example brought on the flood-tide of *Bhakti* in Monghyr. Even the utterly worldly-minded came and joined the Brahma Samaj. The humility, the love and the mutual attachment among the Brahmas made us feel that it was all heavenly. Even the hardest heart would melt in the fire of *upasana* (worship) in Monghyr. Many sinners have received new spiritual life through this *Bhakti*. Seeing all this one felt that the Brahma Samaj had become heaven itself.[2]

The *Bhakti* movement did not degenerate into inane sentimentalism. Side by side with emotional fervour there went on vigorous activities—social, educational and philanthropic endeavours, and missionary expeditions to all parts of the country for rallying people round the banner of reconstruction. Apart from all these, Keshub was actively negotiating with the Government as to the ways and means of enacting a statute legalising Brahma marriages. Hitherto, the intrepid reformers had never taken thought as to their legal position. They had gone in for an unidolatrous form of Hindu marriage, and for the prohibited inter-caste marriage, regardless of their invalidity in the

[1] *An Historical Sketch of the Brahma Samaj* by Miss Sophia Dobson Collet, pp. 19-20.

[2] Translated from *Amar Jibaney Brahma Samajer Parikshita Vrittanta* (Experiences of the Brahma Samaj in my life) 1886, pp. 40-41—published under the auspices of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

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eye of the existing Hindu law. They had proceeded on the principle that "to do the right and to follow right were wisdom in scorn of consequence." Even now they were prepared to face the consequence, harmful though it might be to their worldly interests, if the protection of law were not forthcoming. But Keshub felt that, quite apart from pioneers, in the interests of those who might in future wish to join the Brahma Samaj, it would act as a deterrent if reformed marriages were to remain invalid in the eye of law; and that it was, therefore, just and proper to invoke the protection of legislation. With this end in view he left Monghyr in August, 1868 for Simla whither Lord Lawrence, the Viceroy, had invited him. As a result of the constant discussions he held there with the authorities in charge of legislation, the Marriage Bill was introduced into the Governor-General's Council in September of that year. Keshub returned to Calcutta leaving the Bill to go through its usual course of examination and discussion before it could be passed as an Act. Shortly after his return, the day drew near for the celebration of the thirty-ninth anniversary of the foundation of the Brahma Samaj in January 1869. The construction of the new Brahma Mandir had been going on apace, but the building was still unfinished. Keshub held the anniversary celebration in the unfinished Mandir. His anniversary lecture, which had now become almost a regular annual function looked forward to by all classes of people, was fittingly entitled 'The Future Church.'

This is how Keshub portrayed the future Church in that lecture:

CHURCH FOR ALL MANKIND

Instead of a hundred hostile churches there shall be upreared, in the fulness of time, one vast cathedral where all mankind shall worship, with one heart, the Supreme Creator * * * Such brotherhood among all mankind will be realised in the Church of the future. Its cardinal doctrine will be the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It will adopt this simple creed as embracing the whole of morality and religion—the whole of the law and the prophets—and will not

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seek salvation in tedious articles of faith and elaborate dogmas. Thus the wise and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, shall dwell together in the holy tabernacle of God, rendering mutual services, under the inviolable covenant of brotherhood, for each other's temporal and spiritual welfare, and sharing with each other the blessings vouchsafed by their common Father. * * *

THOROUGHLY NATIONAL IN EACH NATION, YET ONE COMMON CHURCH FOR ALL NATIONS

But the Church of India must be thoroughly national; it must be essentially an Indian Church. The future religion of the world I have described will be the common religion of all nations, but in each nation it will have an indigenous growth and assume a distinctive and peculiar character. *All mankind will unite in a universal Church; at the same time, it will be adapted to the peculiar circumstance of each nation, and assume a national form.* No country will borrow or mechanically imitate the religion of another country; but from the depths of the life of each nation its future church will naturally grow up.

On this point of natural and national unfoldment Keshub remained true to himself to the last. From the year 1860 down to his last day the idea of a full and 'whole' life, on truly national lines, formed the burden of his message. Only, as the years rolled on, the idea became wider and its content richer and richer, more and more concrete and tangible. How the idea had got young India in its grip can only be partially appreciated now from the contemporary writings and from the events that happened in quick succession.

THE BHARAT-VARSHIYA BRAHMA MANDIR

On the 22nd of August 1869 (7th *Bhadra*, 1791 B.S.) the newly built Brahma Mandir was formally opened for regular public worship, with feelings of deepest thankfulness and amid enthusiasm that knew no bounds. In form, the stately Mandir was a harmonious blend of the Hindu, the Gothic, the Buddhistic and the Saracenic styles of architecture thus setting forth in externals the harmony within,

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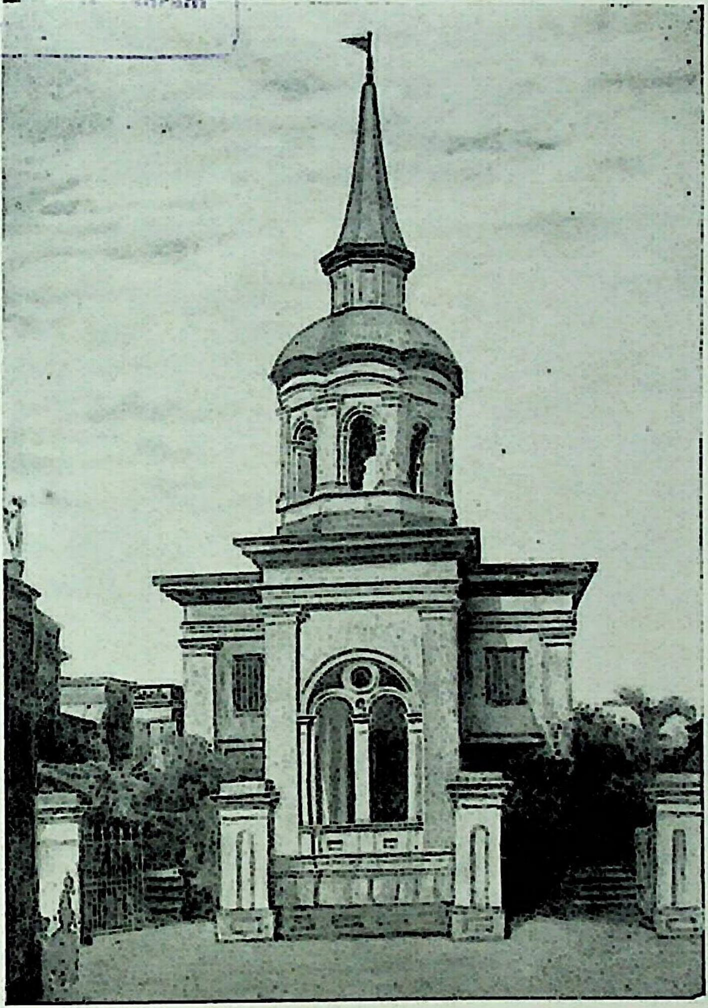

Bharatvarshiya Brahma Mandir

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which the future church stood for. In opening the Mandir Keshub thus explained its objects and principles:

REVERENCE FOR ALL TRUTHS

This building is established with the object of paying reverence to all truths that exist in the world. This temple is founded with the object that all quarrel, all misunderstanding, all pride of caste may be destroyed, and all brotherly feeling may be perpetuated.

The occasion was marked by an important and imposing ceremony in which twenty-one young men, many of whom have since played a conspicuous part in the Brahma Samaj, and two ladies, declared their acceptance of the theistic covenant and received the solemn charge from Keshub as to their new duties and responsibilities. Prominent among these were Ananda Mohan Bose, Shivanath Shastri and Keshub's youngest brother, Krishna Behary Sen.

THE EAST BENGAL BRAHMA MANDIR

A similar event was signalised in East Bengal. On the 4th of December, accompanied by three fellow-workers, Keshub arrived at Dacca to consecrate the East Bengal Brahma Mandir. Here there were the materials for a wide conflagration, only waiting for the kindling touch of Keshub. That the Brahma Samaj had touched the soul of the coming generation became apparent from the fact that no less than thirty-six young men of high connection and influence came forward on the 7th December, two days after the day of the consecration ceremony, to declare their acceptance of the theistic covenant from Keshub. Great was the persecution which the brave thirty-six had to face, but they rose above it. They included Banga Chandra Roy—afterwards Minister of the East Bengal Brahma Samaj—Kali Narain Gupta and many others who have played a prominent part in the Brahma Samaj.

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PRE

VI

VISIT TO ENGLAND

(1870)

Towards the end of 1860, for the first time, Keshub publicly declared his intention of shortly proceeding to England. That resolution was carried out almost as soon as it was conceived. On the 2nd February, he delivered a public address in the Town Hall of Calcutta on 'England and India' in which he said that his object in going to England was not to represent the interests of any particular section of people, the rich or the poor, the landlord or the tenant, but he was going there as a learner so as to be able to serve the cause of truth and that of his country all the better. Indeed, there was no learner greater than Keshub. In his *Jeevan-Veda* (Scripture of Life) he observes: "I have never looked upon myself as a teacher, and never shall. I came as a learner, I am still learning and forever shall remain a disciple. * * * To learn is my trade, my life, my happiness, my salvation." When, therefore, he said he was going to England as a learner, he did not speak words of modesty, but words of real self-expression. Yet events showed that in that learner the West found something of which she had lost the trail, something that she sorely needed from the East to lift her out of the morass of doubt and denominationalism. Keshub sailed from Calcutta on the 15th of February 1870 and arrived in London on the 21st of March.

PEOPLE HE MET

He was met on arrival by many English and Indian friends, ready with their offer of hospitality. But he preferred to put up, in the first instance, "with B and R",

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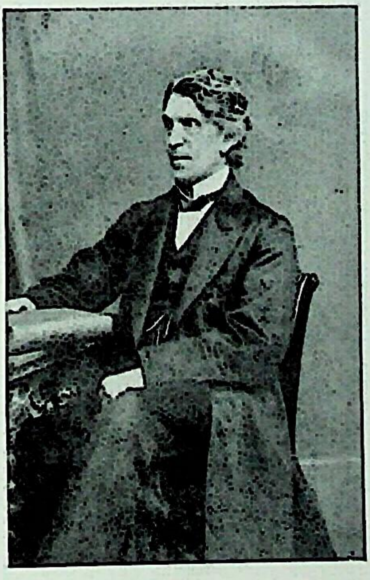
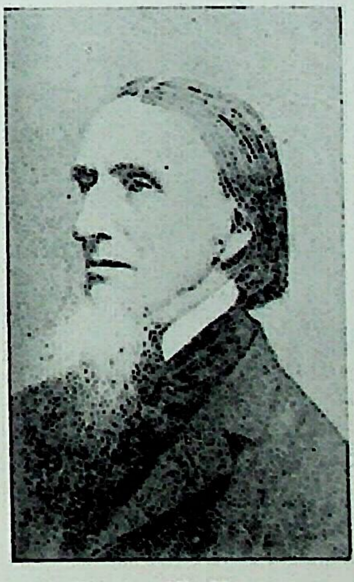
ENTED

REV. ROBERT SPEARS

SAMUEL SHARPE



DR. JAMES MARTINEAU, 1870



FRANCIS W. NEWMAN

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as he says in his Diary[1]. His first act after arrival was to call on old friends. There were some with whom he had been in correspondence but whom he had never met face to face, others whom he had seen and known in India. Besides these, there was a host of others—statesmen, Church dignitaries, ministers, scientists, thinkers, free-lances, philosophers, philanthropists, legislators, pious Christian householders of all denominations with whom he came into intimate contact as days passed. With the magnetism of his personality he seemed to attract every one and for the moment all differences among warring creeds and denominations seemed to have been forgotten. The entries in his diary, though not elaborate, afford interesting pen pictures of some of those with whom he came in touch. The day after his arrival he called on Miss Collet, Miss Frances Power Cobbe and his friend and sincere well-wisher Lord Lawrence. Of Miss Collet Keshub makes the following characteristic entry in his diary:

> Have a long talk with her on a variety of subjects. Her mind is of an eminently historical, or rather statistical, type; she is ever gathering facts and eliciting information.

Nothing seems to size up Miss Collet better than the above few words. Despite her physical infirmities, for eight long years after, Miss Collet continued to follow Keshub's endeavours and activities with interest and painstaking devotion. This enabled her to chronicle and broadcast, as she did, a great many developments of the Brahma Samaj during that period with commendable understanding and sympathy. Unfortunately, the cordial relation did not last longer, and the violent re-action which her nature suffered threw her ever after completely out of sympathy with Keshub's motives and movements. It is remarkable, however, that with the exception of one or two, the rest of the

[1] B. L. Gupta and R. C. Dutt who along with S. N. Banerjee were then in England. A. M. Bose was among the students who accompanied Keshub to England for purposes of study. All three are well-known as having distinguished themselves afterwards in different spheres of activity.

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valuable friendships which Keshub made during his sojourn in England proved life-long.

Such was the friendship with Miss Frances Power Cobbe, the writer-philosopher of the last century. About her, Keshub makes the following entry in his Diary:

> I am highly delighted with the conversation we have about our spiritual experiences. I give a sketch of the history of my conversion and point out the workings of God's providence, and as I narrate the incidents I see her eyes filled with tears and her whole countenance impressed with devotional sympathy. She tells me how she has been brought to the Lord in the same way and how in different and remote places we have been moved by the same spirit. How wonderful and mysterious are God's ways of converting sinners! The East and the West must unite.

No wonder that such spiritual relationship should have stood the test of time and circumstances. Later in life, when Keshub, much misunderstood, was deserted by some of his nearest and dearest friends, there came from this noble soul an unsolicited assurance of her understanding sympathy. Not content with that Miss Cobbe went out of her way to publish her defence of Keshub in the *Christian Life* in which she expressed her appreciation thus:

> The brief intercourse which I enjoyed with Mr. Sen during his visit to England has left on my mind an ineffaceable impression of his goodness, piety, nay, rather I should say, his saintliness, such as scarcely any other living man has ever made. As he quitted me one day after a long converse on things of the soul, I remember to have said to myself, "Now I think I understand somewhat of how men and women felt who talked to Christ."[1]

With Francis W. Newman Keshub had had, as early as 1861, some correspondence on matters that vitally affected India. The visit to England afforded an opportunity for cementing that friendship and for having a cordial exchange of ideas. But the most eventful was the lunch on the 1st April to which he was invited by Dean Stanley of Westminster Abbey where he met Max Müller. It was the

[1] *Christian Life*, March 1878; *Brahmo Public Opinion*, May 16, 1878.

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beginning of an abiding friendship with these two remarkable men. Writing of Keshub in 1884 Max Müller thus records his recollections:

> His stay in England was a constant triumph. "He had many personal characteristics," as the *Indian Daily News* truly said, "which fitted him for religious work. A fine countenance, a majestic presence, and that rapt look which itself exerts an almost irresistible fascination over impressible minds, lent wonderful force to a swift, kindling and poetical oratory which married itself to his highly spiritual teaching as perfect music unto noble words." * * * Many of my readers must remember his eloquent addresses and the deep impression which they produced in the widest spheres. His name has become almost a household word in England, and I have been struck, when lecturing in different places, to find that the mere mention of Keshub Chunder Sen's name elicited applause for which I was hardly prepared. I made his personal acquaintance in London at the house of my friend Dean Stanley. He afterwards paid a visit to me at Oxford and our friendship which then began has lasted to the end.[1]

As regards Dean Stanley's appreciation of Keshub we get it best from Max Müller himself:

> Stanley had been to the end a staunch friend of Keshub Chunder Sen. As was usual with him, the attacks on the Indian reformer had only served to strengthen Stanley's sympathy for him and he several times asked me how he could help him (Keshub).[2]

Keshub met most of the persons, with whom permanent relations of friendship and cordiality sprang up, during the first few days of his arrival in London, and before a public reception was accorded to him. At a tea party at Miss Cobbe's on the 24th March which he records in his Diary, he met several ladies and gentlemen interested in him and his work.

Foremost among them is Miss Elizabeth Sharpe, whose charming verses containing the immortal line 'To me salvation

[1] *Biographical Essays* by Max Müller, p. 72. Longmans Green & Co., 1898.
[2] *Ibid*, pp. 128-129.

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comes from the Eastern shore' appeared in the *Indian Mirror* and excited the deepest interest in our country. I am also introduced to Mr. Grant Duff, Mrs. Manning, Miss Manning, Miss Elliot, and the excellent Secretary of the Unitarian Association, Rev. Mr. Spears. After the party have dispersed Mr. Spears and Miss Cobbe make arrangements for the public meeting to be held to welcome me under the auspices of the Unitarian Association and also for better lodgings for me.

On the 28th March he attended Mrs. Crawshay's 'At Home'.

Here I make many friends. Amongst others I should mention Rev. Mr. Conway[1] who tells me that he is connected with two Theistic Chapels in London where he preaches pure Theism. I heartily rejoice to hear this.

On the 29th March he met Lord Shaftesbury. The Diary of that date contains the following entry :—

Though far advanced in age His Lordship is full of earnestness; and though at the head of the most orthodox and narrow-minded section of the Christian Church he offers me cordial sympathy and greatly interests me by a talk about the philanthropic movements in which he is engaged. * * * In the evening I attend Mrs. Manning's 'At Home' where I am delighted to meet Mr. Seely, the author of 'Ecce Homo.'

Meanwhile Mr. Spears was taking Keshub about a good deal to places of interest and showing him the sights of London. On the 10th April he preached a sermon in Mr. Martineau's Chapel, the usual service being conducted by the latter. On the 12th April, the date fixed for the public reception at Hanover Square Rooms, the Diary shows, among others, the following entry.

A host of big people call on me to-day * * * Then comes quite unexpectedly the leader of English thought, the greatest thinker of the age—Mr. John Stuart Mill. He puts to me a variety of questions, mostly political, regarding India, such as the education cess, income tax, administration of justice, character of Anglo-Indian, etc.

[1] Author of *Sacred Anthology.*

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The details of this interview obtained from Keshub's companion friend who was an eye-witness are interesting: Mr. Mill had called without appointment when Keshub was busy writing his Indian mail. Keshub therefore begged to be excused for a time till he could finish his important letters and then attend to his distinguished visitor. Keshub's Indian companions were greatly exercised in mind over this, lest such a request should be taken amiss ; but the great utilitarian philosopher, as might be expected of him, was too reasonable to misunderstand. He occupied himself with a newspaper and quietly waited till Keshub had finished his correspondence. After their conversation, Keshub, as usual, to show respect to his visitor, wanted to accompany him to the door but Mill, greatly embarrassed at it, resisted every effort on Keshub's part to do so. The latter was much impressed with the philosopher's exceeding humility and courtesy. Of Gladstone who invited him to lunch we find the following entry:

> Our host is a very genial and kind-hearted man though his very appearance shows he has the tremendous weight of the whole government on his shoulders.

He was received as an honoured friend in many English homes. Both in the diary and in the correspondence which has survived one finds constant mention of the Spears family in Highgate, the Sharpes of Highbury Terrace, the Taylors of Camberwell, the Dawbarns of Liverpool, the Courtaulds, the Keatings, the Glovers, the Hicksons, the Clephens, and the Winkworths.

THE WELCOME SOIREE

The Welcome Soirée of the 12th of April at the Hanover Square Rooms was an epoch-making event not only for India, but also for England. It was a fitting prelude to Keshub's brilliant career in England which Max Müller has described as "a constant triumph". It was presided over by Mr. Samuel Sharpe, President of the

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British and Foreign Unitarian Association. An enthusiastic and brilliant auditory comprising Ministers and lay representatives of all religious denominations crowded the rooms and the platform. As Mozoomdar puts it,

> The speeches and proceedings which have been repeatedly published were characterised by a cordial harmony which seemed for the moment to indicate that all sectarianism and religious animosity were at an end in the British Isles. There were three or four members of Parliament, headed by Lord Lawrence, (retired Governor-General of India), then in the zenith of his Indian reputation. Dr. Cappel represented advanced Roman Catholicism. Dean Stanley stood for the noblest phase of thought in the Church of England, the Rev. Stopford Brooke, then the prince of Broad Church clergymen, was there; the venerable Dr. Marks, the patriarch of reformed English Judaism attended; the late Mr. Samuel Sharpe, the Egyptologist, and Dr. James Martineau, the metaphysician, represented the two wings of Unitarianism; Dr. Mullens was the fit representative of Anglo-Indian Missionaries, and there were dozens of others of lesser note, men who flocked by an unaccountable impulse from every Christian denomination, whom no human attraction could bring together before. Every one did his very best on the occasion, every speech was the outburst of sympathy and good-will for the Brahma Samaj. Well might the Dean of Westminster compare the spectacle before him to "the great national sanctuary committed to his care, which enshrines the virtues and genius of every sect alike—that Temple of Silence and Reconciliation, as it has been called, in which the enmities of twenty generations lie buried and forgiven."

The occasion inspired Keshub to speak with the utmost possible freedom and candour of his mission to England and of his high hopes as to how it would fructify for the good not only of India but of England as well:

> The peculiarly catholic feature of this meeting interests me deeply. I see on this great platform ministers of ten different sections of Christ's Church assembled together to honour India, to encourage India in her great work of self-reformation. I feel that though, in regard to doctrines and dogmas, there are differences among us, and must continue to be, yet still we are all one in spirit, one in soul and heart, so far as we recognize those vital and central truths which Jesus

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Christ promulgated.—Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and love thy neighbour as thyself. These two, I believe, are the cardinal principles of true religion as taught by him. (Applause.) * * *

* * * I come here, my friends, to study Christianity in its living and spiritual forms. I do not come to study the doctrines of Christianity, but truly Christian life as displayed and illustrated in England. I come to study the spirit of Christian philanthropy, of Christian charity, and honourable Christian self-denial. * * * Now, my friends, pardon me if I say that you have done great harm to our people in sending into our country a large number of nominal Christians, who though they have in their minds doctrines and dogmas in endless number, do not show strict and faithful allegiance to their master Jesus Christ in actual life. * * *

* * * Your destinies and the destinies of India are interwoven with each other; your interests and our interests are identified; and I hope, therefore, you will no longer withhold from us that active sympathy, that friendly co-operation, which you have for a long time denied us—not because you were wanting in sympathy, but because you did not know enough of us. I have given you my warmest thanks for what England has already done for us; but she has still a great many things to do. There are many serious defects in the administrative machinery which have to be rectified, many just grievances of the people to be redressed, many instances of injustice and oppression whose recurrence should be prevented by more humane legislation, many scandals which have to be removed. For these you are responsible, and I trust you will not neglect to give India all she wants, and which she has a right to demand from you. You must do justice to my country. You must prove true to the sacred trust Providence has reposed in you. * * * Let us all unite, for the glory of India and for the glory of England, to discharge the great duties we owe to these two countries, which an All-Wise and All-Merciful God has united together in the inscrutable economy of His providence. * * *

The resolution which was moved by the Dean of Westminster was happily worded thus:—"That this meeting composed of members of nearly all Protestant Churches offers a hearty welcome to Keshub Chunder Sen, the distinguished religious reformer of India, and assures him and his fellow-labourers of its sympathy with them in their great and praise-worthy work of abolishing idolatry, break-

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ing down caste, and diffusing a higher moral and intellec tual life—amongst the people of that vast empire." A characteristic contribution was made by Dr. Marks, th Jewish representative, who observed:

What the distinguished gentleman has effected in India, I know but very partially; what he was intended to effect is no doubt great, and I pray to Almighty God to crown his effort But I am not indifferent to what he has effected here. I have only to look round to see how our guest has been the means o bringing men honestly differing from each other to put aside al their differences, and seeing what has been done in that respec I am almost inclined to throw myself back upon what my Jewish fathers, ages ago, set forth as an evidence of the advent o Messiah, when men should be more attracted by those thing upon which they might agree in common, than they should be repulsed by those things on which they honestly differed. As a Jew and on the part of Jews I bid our guest God-speed.

It was left to the great Dr. Martineau to bring out th true philosophy underlying the genesis and genius of th Brahma Samaj movement and also to declare that th future of the world's religion lay in the East and not in th West. He boldly made this pronouncement in the midst o that vast assemblage in language of great beauty of which he was such a master:

It merits special remark, that the reform of which ou distinguished guest is the representative is no restoration appealing to recognized historical authority, but a movemen creative of faith *de novo*. It does not derive itself from th ancient religion of the country, nor from Christianity, bu commences afresh from the native resources of the huma heart and soul. There are times when the religious sense clogged with unrealities, has absolute need to clear itself o the tangle of traditional and inherited beliefs, and instead o struggling for the truth by merely thinning away the thicke of difficulty in which our minds have lost their way, to begi afresh, and to see what can be done with the native resource of humanity reverting to the Living God. * * * Is it no so with the Brahma Samaj? Here are a teacher and a peopl who have left their popular religion, and have not made them selves dependent on any other; but who yet so realise the lif of man with God as to dedicate themselves to justice, purity

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ESENTED

1. A. M. Bose
2. S. N. Banerjee
3. B. L. Gupta
4. R. C. Dutt

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> What the distinguished gentleman has effected in India, I know but very partially; what he was intended to effect is no doubt great, and I pray to Almighty God to crown his effort. But I am not indifferent to what he has effected here. I have only to look round to see how our guest has been the means of bringing men honestly differing from each other to put aside all their differences, and seeing what has been done in that respect I am almost inclined to throw myself back upon what my Jewish fathers, ages ago, set forth as an evidence of the advent of Messiah, when men should be more attracted by those things upon which they might agree in common, than they should be repulsed by those things on which they honestly differed. As a Jew and on the part of Jews I bid our guest God-speed.

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ESENTED

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and piety towards men, and a tender piety and saintly truth towards God. The result has been what I believe it ever will be—that God and the human soul have found each other out. * * * Many a time has the Divine interpretation of the world—many a time have successive religions come to the West from the East. I believe it is destined to be so again. The European mind has a certain hardness in it, in virtue of which intellectual force is gained at the expense of spiritual depth; and the larger the scientific universe becomes, the more does it shut us up in a materialist prison, and disqualify us for passing from the laws of things to the Divine Cause of Life. It seems in our own time as if there is to be again an apparent hostility between Science and Religion. With the Indian genius I believe it will be otherwise. While quick to absorb and appropriate all modern science, it will do so without sacrificing at the same time the Divine interpretation of the universe. It will put our hard and gross philosophy into the crucible under a more refining and intenser fire, and save many an element which we have lost. With subtler thought and gentler affections, it will go behind the phenomena which stop our way, and bring back the flood of Divine light upon the world.

MANIFOLD ENGAGEMENTS

Soon after the Welcome Soirée engagements multiplied, invitations poured in to preach from Unitarian and Congregationalist pulpits and also to address meetings organised by various bodies, such as the Temperance Society, the Swedenborg Society, the Peace Society, the Ragged School Union, etc. He was received everywhere with open arms and his utterances created a profound impression. John Bull, as is his wont, lionised him to his heart's content. Ordinarily, the hero whom he lionises is a personality of an entirely different character. A Kitchener, a Lord Roberts, a Charlie Chaplin, a Jack Johnson usually engages his fancy. Seldom has he been found to rivet his attentions on a mild Hindu sojourning in London on a socio-religious mission. The *Punch*, which always acts as a barometer of British public opinion, did not fail to seize the opportunity. It promptly came out with the following notice in the form of a doggerel:

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Who on earth of living men,
Is Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen?
I doubt if ever one in ten
Knows Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen.
Have you heard, if so, where and when
Of Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen?
The name surpasses human ken—
Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen.
To write it almost spoils my pen;
Look—Baboo—Keshub—Chunder—Sen!

Keshub lectured on a variety of subjects, among others on Hindu Theism, Christ and Christianity, England's duties to India, Liquor traffic in India, Women in India. In all these he fearlessly pointed out the blemishes in the administration of India and adjured the British public to lend their help in bringing about the reforms which were urgently needed, and for the accomplishment of which the educated public in India were prepared to co-operate with the British Government. In his lecture on 'Christ and Christianity' he thus reiterated his conception of the Universal Church:

I should be a traitor to the Universal church of Theism to which I belong, if my heart and soul were not capacious enough to take in the whole length and breadth of the Christian Church. Come unto me, brothers and sisters, of England and France, Germany and Switzerland, and Italy and all Europe; come unto me, brothers and sisters of America, come, all nations of the world, and let us all co-operate, so far as we desire to be faithful to Christ, to hasten the day when the Kingdom of Heaven shall be established on earth; let us all strive unitedly and individually to realize that happy and heavenly kingdom which he predicted. The world needs it. Break up the barriers that divide Church from Church and sect from sect. I appear before you to-night as an advocate of the religion of love. Weak and feeble unfortunately is my voice; but, oh, I wish sincerely and earnestly from the depths of my heart to proclaim to all nations the great doctrine of the unity of God's Church.

The London *Spectator* came out with the following comment on the lecture:—

A unique sort of lecture on 'Christ and Christianity' was delivered last Saturday at St. James's Hall by Keshub

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Chunder Sen from the standpoint of Indian theism. * * * Christianity had a different language from that of Christ; it was split up into one-sided sects, who placed salvation in various externalities; and not in "Christ in the heart". The moderation and kindliness with which Mr. Sen indicated the shortcomings of English Christianity, and the fervent eloquence with which he painted the realities of a true spiritual faith made a very favourable impression upon a large and mixed audience.

The lecture on 'England's Duties to India,' delivered in Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle which was presided over by Lord Lawrence caused a widespread sensation in England and in this country. Keshub was not the man to miss the opportunity of putting in a fervent plea for urgently needed reforms in the administration. He urged for opening up to Indians the higher appointments in the administration, for restoration of the State scholarship (which had been discontinued) to enable students to receive further training in England, for normal schools for training of female teachers, for extension of female education on national lines, for mass education, for making vernacular the medium of instruction, for suppression of the liquor traffic, for better treatment of Indians by British officials. On the last two points he did not mince matters in the least but gave out his mind freely and frankly as man to man. At this distance of time, as one rises from reading his observations one cannot help saying that never man spoke so boldly and with such power of persuasion on these vital questions. Referring to the liquor traffic he said:

* * * Allow me to tell you that that traffic has produced demoralizing effects among the people of India, which you may witness with your own eyes. * * * I have told you that they are naturally fond of temperance and sobriety. They hate intemperance and drunkenness—(cheers)—and drinking has never found any favour amongst them as a custom. They are not going into the paths of intemperance from the inherent depravity of their nature, but because many of the English people there, by the wickedness of their lives, and the English Government by bad liquor-traffic rules, have succeeded in placing formidable temptations in the way of the Indian people.

7

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I fear the Indian Government is responsible to God for this—(cheers)—and is chargeable with a portion of the sins of my countrymen. (Renewed cheers.) I have seen year after year the flower of Bengalee youth driven into untimely graves through drink and can I, shall I, ever forget this? * * * Oh! may the British nation try in a penitent and righteous spirit to wipe off this serious reproach cast upon its administration! (Loud and long-continued cheers.) "A Government should so legislate," it has been ably said by Mr. Gladstone, "as to make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong," and I hope the British Indian administration will always be carried on in a way conformable to the spirit of this noble and wise maxim (cheers). Let the Indians under the British Government find it exceedingly difficult to be intemperate, and let them feel that the Government always tries to enable them to do that which is right and consonant to the will of God. * * *

Speaking of the treatment of Indians by Englishmen he observed:

* * * Let me also tell you that when your people go to India, they should always take with them a large quantity of that commodity known as Christian patience. * * * Some of them not only ill-treat my countrymen in the most wanton manner, but are sometimes driven by anger to deeds of violence and murder. (Shame). I know there are cases on record—and let courts of justice bear witness to this great and astounding truth—in which immoral, unconscientious, and heartless Christians, so-called, inflicted violent kicks and blows on poor helpless natives till they died. In some cases death has resulted from careless shooting and wild sport and amusement. (Shame.) Some time ago a most brutal assault was committed on a number of poor women in East Bengal. * * * If I have not succeeded in making a good speech, I have at least told you certain plain truths about your duty to India—I have given you a programme of moral and social reforms which my country needs, and I believe it is your duty to try earnestly to carry out these reforms. (Cheers.) I have not made an appeal to the mere feelings of the audience, to abnormal sentimentalism; I have told you some plain truths and now I ask you to do justice to India. (Cheers). * * *

After two months in London, during which his fame travelled far and wide in the British Isles, Keshub started on his provincial tour. Mr. Spears drew up the outline of

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the itinerary as far as possible in advance leaving the details to be filled in according to local requirements. Short instructions were sent to his prospective hosts as to how they could best look after him. The following is an interesting specimen:

> Mr. Sen and his cousin Mr. Prosunno[1] are vegetarians and so abstain from all animal food and eggs, and all alcoholic drinks as well. Their drink is water or lemonade, they also enjoy warm milk. For breakfast, the following may be prepared: boiled rice and sliced potatoes fried in butter: also vegetable or peasoup. Dinner, the same as breakfast, with fruit, puddings and sweets; no eggs in the pastry. In all cases they desire to be entertained together.

The first place he visited was Bristol. There he stayed at the celebrated Red Lodge House as the guest of Miss Mary Carpenter whose intimate acquaintance he had made two years ago at Calcutta. Indeed she was largely instrumental in arranging Keshub's programme in London with the help of the Unitarian leaders, Lord Lawrence and the Earl of Shaftesbury. Keshub made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Raja Ram Mohan in Arno's Vale Cemetery, preached to a crowded congregation in Lewin's Mead Capel where he occupied the pulpit of the late Rev. Dr. Lant Carpenter, the friend of Raja Ram Mohan. In that place the noble Raja listened to him for the last time, as he preached of the Prophet's cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, but which brought fertilising rain over the whole land. Surely that was being fulfilled! In honour of Keshub's visit Miss Carpenter founded the National Indian Association which is functioning to this day in London. There was a grand reception at Bristol given to Keshub, who then left for Bath. At Bath, Leicester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, in fact at every place he visited, public receptions became the order of the day and Keshub addressed large and enthusiastic

[1] Prosunno Coomar Sen who accompanied him on his trip to England and remained as his constant companion throughout. On return from England he gave up worldly avocations, and became a missionary of the Brahma Samaj.

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audiences. What were the themes on which he could address such a vast variety of audiences? They differed with the particular occasion and the circumstances of each meeting. What is most striking and characteristic is the frankness and straight-forwardness with which he put his case for India before the British public.

THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC

In the stirring times through which India is now passing, when Total Abolition has become the objective of the party in power in Indian politics of to-day, it would be interesting to know that the first stone effectively cast at the Liquor Traffic in India was by Keshub Chunder Sen. Speaking to crowded and mixed assemblies made up of all manner of Britishers Keshub thus declaimed against it:

> When Governments come forward to encourage intemperance, this evil really assumes appalling proportions, and it then not only kills individuals, but it kills nations and races outright. Power is a tremendous thing; when abused it becomes a frightful scourge, which can crush down nations in a moment; and when properly used by a good Government, it becomes the means of raising and purifying not only a few individuals, but a whole nation. The British Government has been invested by God with power over one hundred and eighty millions[1] of people in my country and it is quite possible for that Government to trample under foot thousands and tens of thousands of souls, and to sacrifice their interests, both temporal and spiritual. Alas! such a possibility has already in some measure been realised. The British Government has shown our people that for the sake of money great evils could be encouraged. I wish my countrymen could believe that such a thing was impossible with a Christian Government; but no, things have come to pass which no longer allow this evil to be veiled from their eyes. They see clearly that the British Government is actuated by sordid motives of filthy lucre; and for the sake of a few millions of pounds, is really doing prodigious mischief by encouraging this great evil of intemperance in India. I am sorry to hear it said by some Englishmen in this country that the Hindus are not temperate; that the

[1] Speech at a meeting organised by the United Kingdom Alliance at Trevelyan Hall, Manchester, with Mr. Alderman Harvey, J.P., in the chair.—*K. C. Sen's Lectures in England.*

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John Stuart Mill

Dean Stanley of Westminster

William Ewart Gladstone

Max Muller, 1870

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Government did not make them intemperate, but that they were so before the advent of the British Government. I should always stand forward to protest against this statement, for I do believe that my countrymen were always simple, and sober, and abstemious. Whatever a few individuals, or a few races here and there might do under the influence of the worst passions of the heart; or whatever the teachings and practices of certain exceptional Hindu sects may be it is an admitted fact that, throughout the length and breadth of India, temperance forms the chief trait in the national character of the Hindu. It cannot be denied that the influence of the drinking habits of European residents in India, and the alarming number of liquor shops opened in the country under British administration, have introduced this dreadful evil there, and effected a sad change in the tastes and habits of the people. * * * they do not for one moment take into consideration, what must be regarded as a sound and well-tested principle, that if they do not amend matters in time this traffic will be, a few years hence, an established and indispensable item as a source of revenue in the Indian financial system, and it will be as impossible to touch the liquor traffic question then as they say it is impossible to touch the question of opium traffic now. (Hear, hear.) Lest that come to pass, is it not our duty to mend matters in time? * * * I have no faith in that Christianity, I must honestly and candidly say, which can teach a government to encourage the great sin of intemperance. (Cheers).[1]

Again, speaking at Liverpool he thus delivered himself:—

* * * I am sorry to say that the British Government stands convicted before God on account of having kept up this iniquitous traffic, and thereby effected the moral and spiritual destruction of thousands of souls in our country. Not only does the system debase the people, degrading them mentally and morally, but it has actually been the cursed instrument of killing and sacrificing the lives of many energetic and promising young men in the country. * * * I do not want that cold speculative kind of interest which politicians may admire and statesmen may speak highly of. I want that warmth of heart, that earnestness of purpose, that enthusiasm of spirit, without which it is impossible to bring about any national reformation. I want you to feel the great trust which has been placed in your hands by God Almighty when He committed India to

[1] *See* footnote on page 88.

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your care. You cannot sacrifice the lives of my people—you cannot sacrifice their bodily lives, nor are you justified in sacrificing their souls. Take care of the souls and bodies that have been placed on your hands, for you stand accountable and responsible to the Moral Governor of the Universe for the welfare of the people whom you have been called to govern. I hope and trust most devoutly that England will day after day feel a growing interest in India. * * * I hope and trust that that merciful God who has called you to govern that nation will give you wisdom and strength, faith and piety, enough to rule our race properly; if not, India will not long be in your hands. You will be forced to leave India to herself, and we shall do our business in the best way we can. It is your duty, so long as you hold India in your hands, to act as trustees rendering a due account to God for the way in which you treat the people in that country. (Hear, hear.) Let injustice, oppression, tyranny, and cruelty cease; let us not find haughty Anglo-Indians in India treating the people of the country as if they were nothing more than cattle. I hope the day will come when you will try and respect the lives of the poor and unfortunate people among the lower classes of India—when you will come forward and treat them as your brothers and your sisters; then, and not till then, will you have done justice to all the people in that great peninsula. God help you! God bless you; I hope so long as you are politically connected with India you will discharge your spiritual and moral duties and responsibilities to that vast country conscientiously and honestly. May God be with you, and may He be with us, that there may be harmony between the two nations, that by mutual co-operation we may help each other and bring about the material and moral well-being of the two nations. (Loud applause.) * * *

ON DENATIONALISATION

Throughout the long and eventful tour Keshub was unwearied in his efforts to impress upon the British public that all measures for educational and social reconstruction must be on strictly national lines. It must be remembered that in Keshub's day the process of denationalisation had begun with great pomp and circumstance. In the first flush of reform, social, educational, or religious, a strong section of the reformers were bent upon eschewing all that savoured of the East and extolling everything that came from the

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West. Who raised the first war-cry against this threatened denationalisation? None but Keshub; and he did so in language which shall live unto generations. It is only the patriotic fervour and frankness with which he declaimed against it that disarmed opposition to, or offence at, the strong language which he often used. Speaking at Bath he said:

* * * While other nations that are now in a state of refinement and civilization were sunk in ignorance and barbarism, India possessed a very high order of civilization. There was a system of astronomy formerly in India that has excited the wonder and admiration of succeeding ages. In ancient times, Indian ladies came forward and took part in public undertakings and wrote books. In the early Hindu literature we find the names of Indian ladies who put important religious questions to their husbands and teachers, demanding proper answers. I can never look upon the redeeming features of India's past history without feeling a thrill of patriotic fire running through my heart. Proud of our nationality we shall ask you to give us all the good things you have in England, but not your corruptions. Let the stream of enlightenment and knowledge which you send forth to my country, promote morality and religion without sweeping away Indian nationality. * * *

Then again in Birmingham:

I for one would not allow myself to be denationalised. Bring the influence of English education to bear upon the work of Indian reformation, but I would ask you to let the spirit of Indian nationality develop all that is good therein in a national way. I would ask you to put away all ridiculous theories of denationalising India, and to let all that is good be retained and perpetuated and give India all the assistance you possibly can in working out its own reformation in its own national way.

On his scheme of female education on strictly national lines he thus spoke at the Victoria Discussion Society:

* * * With all my respect and admiration for civilization as it prevails in England, I have always been foremost in protesting against the demoralization of India by importing English customs into it. (Cheers.) Though I can respect learned, intelligent, philanthropic and generous-hearted ladies in England, I could not for one moment persuade myself to believe that for the interest of India I ought to introduce their

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peculiar customs and usages. The growth of society must be indigenous, native and natural. (Hear, hear.) Foreign customs must not be forced upon us. Our women have elements of character which are really noble and good, and these ought to constitute the basis upon which we should raise the superstructure of reformed female society. * * *

Speaking at Edinburgh and Glasgow, where grand public receptions were accorded to him, he again adverted to this topic showing how keenly he realised the danger of destruction which national ideas and sentiments had to face:

* * * Foreign customs a few of my countrymen may admire: a few, addicted to apishness, may adopt them; but, after a time, all that will be gone—it will be altogether effaced. But if you succeed in establishing the work of reformation on the platform of national instincts and national ideas, and if you succeed in establishing all that is good and grand in England and Europe in the heart of India, then I say, the work done will last for centuries. (Applause.) India will attain to greatness and civilization, if only the basis on which we build this vast fabric is national and firm. And such a basis we have in the great ideas of the past. * * *

* * * I come to guard and warn you against that fatal mistake into which, I am sorry to say, many Englishmen in India have fallen of forcing upon the myriads of the Indian population, customs, manners and institutions, which belong altogether to different races. (Applause.) I do not wish you to go to my country to teach the people to eat and drink, or dress just as you do in this country; and I do not exhort you to go and teach them outward refinement of manners. Every nation must stick to its own nationality for ever and ever. * * * But true education in India means, not the destruction of nationality (hear, hear), not the annihilation of the existing order of things, but the union of the East and the West, the preservation and perpetuation of all that is good and great in India, and at the same time the importation into the country of all that is good and great in the West. * * * It has been the endeavour of the Brahma Samaj, with which I am connected, ever since it was organized, to bring together and put into one definite shape the collected truths of the Hindu books; and whatever is good in these—whatever is good in Hindu life—we try to vindicate and establish on a firm, indestructible, national basis, on which to uprear an entirely national civilization. (Applause.) * * *

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But while intensely national he always stood up for harmony between the East and the West, such as would supplement each other's deficiencies and shortcomings. A meeting was convened in London in July 1870 for the purpose of definitely constituting a Theistic Association in London. At this meeting Keshub indicated in what respects England might benefit spiritually from true fellowship with India :—

> * * * English Christian life, however grand and glorious it may be, and it certainly is so in many of its aspects and features, is sadly deficient in devotional fervour and enthusiasm; deficient in feelings such as those which a deep and trustful reliance upon a personal and loving God alone can inspire, support, and sustain. Something like that is to be found in India. I do honestly believe in India there is such a thing as spirituality. In England there is too much materialism. That is my honest conviction. If England and India were to unite and receive from each other the good things they ought to receive from each other, we should be able to form a true Church where spiritual fervour and the activity of material civilization would harmonize, and form the unity of religious life. Whether, therefore, we come to England, America, Germany, or France, or any other country where similar religious movements are going on, we ask them to co-operate with us; we ask the whole world to treat us as fellow-disciples, to give unto us all the good things they possess and enjoy for our benefit, that we may thus collect materials from all existing churches and religious denominations, in order, in the fulness of time, to construct and uprear the future Church of the world. * * *

What was the effect of all this plain speaking? The Anglo-Indian public in India for a time grew distinctly cool towards all that Keshub said or did. Fortunately, however, his intense reality and earnestness, his unimpeachable catholicity and sincerity, prevailed in the long run. It must be said to the infinite credit of true English character that the Britisher never for a moment took Keshub amiss. On the contrary, he was deeply impressed by the very frankness of Keshub's utterances—brutal though that frankness appeared to be at times. The following passage in the prospectus of the National Indian Association will show how his thorough sincerity had reacted on the English mind :

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* * * The visit of Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen to this country has inspired multitudes in every part of the kingdom, not only with sympathy and admiration for himself, but also with respect for the courageous and dignified manner in which he has acknowledged with gratitude what England has done for India, but told her solemnly of her duties to that vast country confided to her guardianship. A desire to help India has thus been awakened in this country which should not be allowed to subside without being called into action. * * * Bristol will rejoice to send through him to India the announcement of the establishment of this association, as the first fruits of his visit amongst us. * * *

At the Farewell Soirée to be presently referred to the same sentiment was thus expressed by one of the prominent speakers :

Mr. Sen has been able to greet face to face men of very different persuasions, who unhappily stood apart from one another when not in the presence of a man like himself, and he had been the means of bringing them together. * * * Of all who have visited this country from foreign lands and succeeded in interesting the people, none has shown a career more simple-hearted, more direct, more straight-forward, more perfectly open at all times, more ready to avow his own convictions, or more determined not to be misunderstood. (Applause.) * * * I trust that those who are present will not be content with clapping their hands in unison, but will forget their sectarianism, and resolve that henceforth whenever they meet a Christian man, a God-fearing man, a man earnest for the truth, under whatever name he appears, they will welcome in him a brother and a child of God, so that Mr. Sen may take away with him an unmistakable indication that there is hope for England as well as for India. * * *

The day of his departure from England now drew nigh. Within his short stay he had addressed thousands of men and women and fired their imagination about everything Indian. His illustrious predecessor Raja Rammohan had influenced groups of intellectuals in London drawing-rooms, who were thus enabled just to establish contact with India. To Keshub was vouchsafed the tremendous advantage of swaying the minds of large audiences with whom India had till then been a closed book but who now felt drawn to it by a strange fascination. So eager was the desire to

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know more and more and to help the work of reform in India that invitations to lecture multiplied. There were pressing invitations from forty provincial towns which for want of time Keshub found it impossible to accept. A most cordial welcome was extended to him from across the Atlantic. But there were matters of moment awaiting him in his own country, and he felt he must turn homeward. Before leaving the British Isles, however, he wished to pay his homage to the Queen-Empress.

INTERVIEW WITH THE QUEEN-EMPRESS

Keshub's politics, as already observed, had a strong tinge of religion. He firmly believed in the hand of providence in history. In the advent of the British to India, in the ampler justice, larger freedom and enlightenment which it promised, in the increasing contact which it brought with the West and with the larger world outside India Keshub saw the unmistakable workings of a great purpose. The idea that the East and the West must unite, must supplement each other's shortcomings and walk hand in hand in the path to future progress, fired him, fed him, sustained him. This he felt was the *finale* of the British advent to India. To all this was added his reverence for Christ as a prince among men. A Christian Government was in his eyes an emissary of Christ and a Christian sovereign but a servant of Christ, in duty bound to infuse the spirit of Christ in the administration of India. Again and again in his public utterances in England and in India he gave expression to this idea. Whenever he saw blemishes in the administration, he condemned them as no man ever did; the language that he employed for the purpose often reminded one of the fiery words of the prophets of old with which they castigated sins and shortcomings. But nothing could take away from him the deep-rooted faith that the future of England and India lay in their genuine and whole-hearted union and co-operation. In cold political parlance this will perhaps be described as the urge

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for 'dominion status' or 'independence within the Empire'. However it may be called, with Keshub it was a deep and abiding conviction, far different from a mere political slogan.

Such being his view, his attitude towards the sovereign was one of genuine and warm-hearted loyalty. It was natural that he should seek an opportunity before leaving England to pay his homage to Her Gracious Majesty Queen-Empress Victoria. The interview, at which Princess Louise was also present, took place at Osborne in September. Keshub was deeply impressed with the interest evinced by the Queen in her Indian subjects. She expressed great satisfaction at the progress made by India of recent years in female education. He presented two portraits of his wife's which were graciously accepted by Her Majesty and the Princess. A few days afterwards, Her Majesty and the Princess honoured him by expressing their desire to have his photograph. Before Keshub left England the Queen graciously presented him with a large engraving of herself. She also presented him with two books 'The Early Years of the Prince Consort' and 'The Highland Journal', the value of which was enhanced by the inscription in her own handwriting, 'To Keshub Chunder Sen from Victoria, *R. I.*, September, 1870'. The deep personal attachment to Her Majesty and the Royal Family which thus sprang up was maintained in later years by his daughter Her Highness Maharanee Sunity Devi and his son-in-law His Highness Maharaja Sir Nripendra Narayan of Cooch Behar, indeed by all the members of the ruling family of Cooch Behar ever since.

THE FAREWELL SOIREE

Prior to his departure for home on the 12th September a Farewell Soirée was held at Hanover Square Rooms which had witnessed his brilliant reception a few months ago. Of all things, said Keshub, what had most impressed him in England were the happy English home, organised

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English charity and English public opinion. As for English Christianity he felt that it was too sectarian, not large enough, not broad enough. "English Christianity appears to me too muscular and hard. It is not soft enough for the purposes of the human heart. On the battle-field, amid the crush of war, Western Christianity offers prayers to God that thousands of men may be slaughtered and butchered." He wound up by saying:

> The result of my visit to England is that as I came here an Indian, I go back a confirmed Indian; I came here a Theist, I return a confirmed Theist. I have learnt to love my own country more and more. English patriotism has by a sort of electric process quickened my own patriotism. I came here a believer in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and I shall return confirmed in this belief. I have not accepted one single new doctrine that God had not put into my mind before; I have not accepted new dogmas or doctrines, but I have tried as far as possible to imbibe the blessed influence of Christian lives.[1]

It may be recalled that in one of his earliest utterances in England, at the Welcome Soirée, he said "I come here, my friends, to study Christianity in its living and spiritual forms * * * I come to study the spirit of Christian philanthropy, of Christian charity, and honourable Christian self-denial." To keep clear of dogmas and doctrines and to imbibe the quintessence of the spirit of Christ was all that mattered to him. During the few months' stay in England he made the fullest use of his opportunities for spiritual companionship with truly Christian souls. And when the time for parting came he could not help speaking without emotion of all the kindness and affection universally shown to him:

> My brethren, the time has come for me to say the last word of farewell. From England I go away, but my heart will always be with you, and England will always be in my heart. Farewell, dear England, "with all thy faults I love thee still". Farewell,

[1] See also his lecture on *General Impressions of England and the English* delivered at the Framjee Cowasjee Institute, Bombay, immediately after return to India, in which the same sentiments are expressed.

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country of Shakespeare and of Newton, land of liberty and charity. Farewell, temporary home, where I realised and tasted and enjoyed the sweetness of brotherly and sisterly love. Farewell, my Father's western house! Farewell, my beloved brothers and sisters!

The London *Spectator* which represents the highest level of considered journalistic criticism, reviewing the proceedings of the Farewell Soirée thus gave within a brief compass and in chosen words a picture of the impression which Keshub's personality and spirituality made on the British nation:

Our Eastern visitor, Keshub Chunder Sen, took leave of his English friends last Monday, at a crowded gathering in the Hanover Square Rooms, previous to his return to India. After a few speeches from representatives of various religious denominations (among which Prof. Plumptre's remarks on the Brahma movement, and the Rev. H. Ierson's on English sects, were notably good) Mr. Sen gave his impressions of England. He painted our social peculiarities and follies with a light, humorous touch, spoke of our great social evils with earnest regret, and expressed his admiration of 'the three great blessings of England', her charities, her homes and her public opinion. On these he dwelt eloquently and urged his hearers to do all in their power to promote the growth of similar blessings in India, where they are so much needed. Lastly, he spoke of English religion, and specially of Christianity, giving utterance to a series of thoughts and conceptions which showed the intense spirituality of his nature and the fulness and depth of his Theism, and indicated more transcendental power than anything he has said here before. He ended by thanking England for his hospitable reception, saying that 'from Her Majesty to the poorest peasant' all had been kind to him. With honest simplicity he put aside the public praise, 'which he did not deserve', and took only the affection of which he could with difficulty speak unmoved.

But no account of Keshub Chunder Sen's visit to England can be complete, and no estimate of its reaction on the advanced religious thought and culture of England can be adequate, without a brief reference to an address by Dr. Martineau, the great thinker-philosopher and divine of the last century, delivered shortly after at

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Liverpool. In that address he dwelt at great length on the re-orientation in religious thought which Keshub's short visit had brought about. It would form a fitting conclusion for this chapter:

Of public events during the last year or two one of the most interesting to myself was the visit of an eminent and pious Oriental who brought us a message of a kind altogether new and peculiar and, I think, singularly instructive to those who appreciate the position of Keshub Chunder Sen in India. (Applause.) It appeared to me that his visit was a natural occasion to us all, to reconsider whether we appreciate correctly —whether, I mean, the Churches appreciate correctly—what really was the essence of our opinion of Christianity. Here was a man come to us from a nation, who might be called in the vulgar and ordinary sense a nation of heathens, but who came to visit a Christian country and who, when he spoke from a platform in London and in various other places, so moved our hearts, so elevated our souls, as to give us a new revelation of what can be the dignity and the nobleness of a pure and simple and devout religious life. The impression was so powerful upon most of us, at least in London, when we heard him preach, that I venture to say very few of us had ever been under a Christian preacher and been moved to so deep a sense of Christian conviction and of Christian humility. * * * There was a soul most congenial to the soul of Jesus * * * and one towards whom Jesus would have a warm and deep affection. Where lies then the essence of our Christianity? Did this man believe, as Christians believe, about the whence Christ had come from and the whither Christ had gone? He did not believe the history of the resurrection; yet at the same time we could not feel that he was an impersonation of the ethics and the spirituality of Christ. (Applause.)

It appears to me that the visit of Keshub Chunder Sen was a demonstration that our churches are wrong in their definition of Christianity (Applause) and that the very essence of it lies, not in the doctrinal and historical machinery, but in the spirituality of which this machinery is the mere vehicle to our souls. If this be so, I think it a lesson of the deepest moment to our Christian churches.

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Shri

VII

NAVAVIDHAN

OR

THE NEW DISPENSATION

(1871-1875)

Reviewing Keshub's address at the Farewell Soirée at the Hanover Square Rooms the London *Spectator* rightly observed that Keshub's utterance laid bare "a series of thoughts and conceptions which showed the intense spirituality of his nature and the fulness and depth of his Theism, and indicated more transcendental power than anything he has said before." The momentous period following his return from England was marked by great creative activity which proved that his thoughts and conceptions had assumed definite concrete form. Keshub's spiritual genius now threw out flowers and foliage. The voice of civilisation, said he, on landing at Bombay, is 'Onward, Forward, Heavenward'; and the march Heavenward for India, he deeply felt, must be characteristic of her spiritual genius. The conviction that the East and the West can, and must, unite and find harmony on truly national lines, and that India must pioneer this harmony, had been deepened and confirmed by his English visit. India, poor in spirit, pious and spiritual, was to assimilate the vigorous practicality and organised altruism of the West. Then and then alone would the march Heavenward be true, steady, triumphant. Keshub would not let this remain a dry doctrine. He lived it and gave it a power and reality such as would leaven his generation and the generations to come. What was before a treasured idea, given to the world in his immortal addresses in India and England, now came forth embodied, on the one hand, in the form of live organisations and institutions and, on the other, in the

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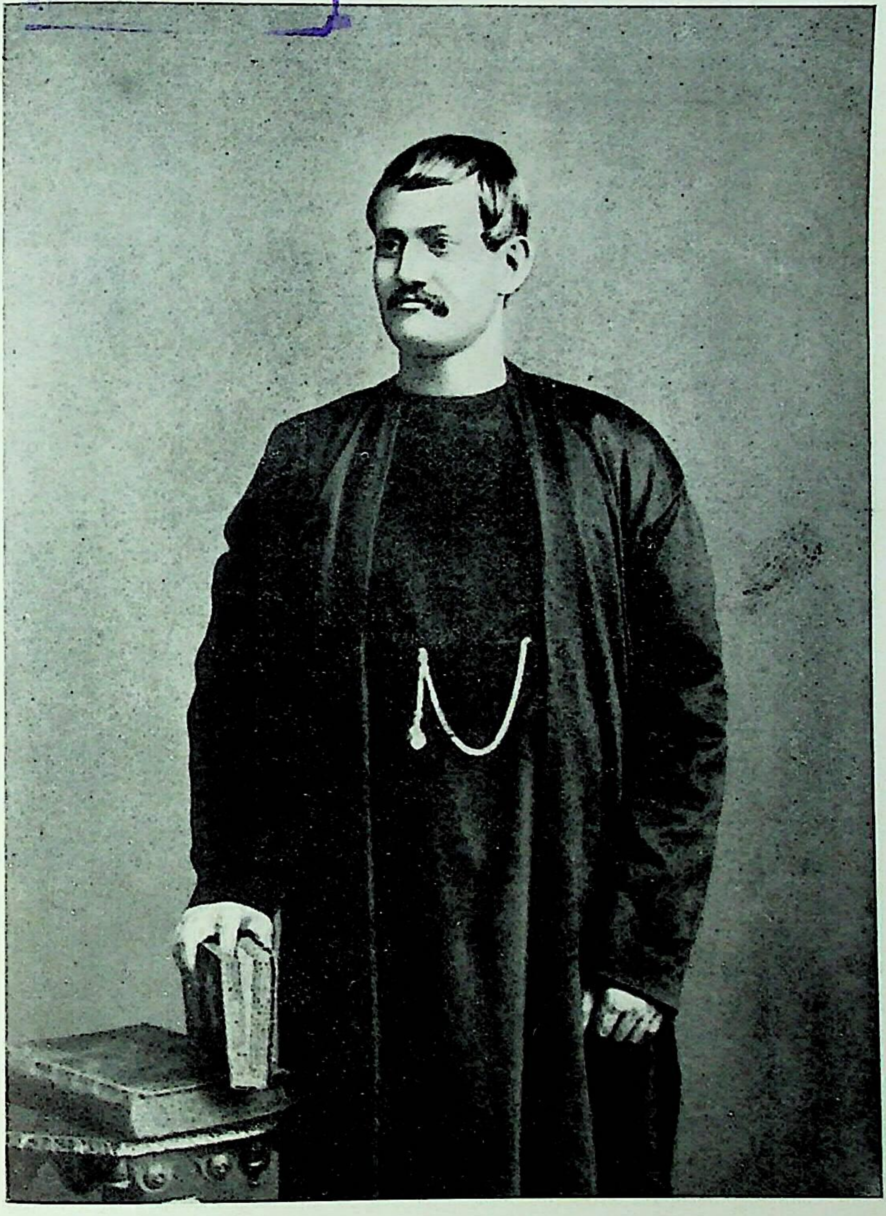

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN IN ENGLAND. 1870

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form of a natural unfolding of spirituality through devotional disciplines. Institutions for industrial education and enlightenment of the masses, for relief of the poor and the distressed, for advancement of women, for promotion of temperance, for creation of a wholesome public opinion sprang into existence in no time and began to function vigorously. By lectures, pamphlets, propaganda, open letters to the authorities, newspaper agitation, resort to legislation—indeed by every manner of means Keshub sought to bring about a veritable awakening. But these testified to only one aspect of the development. Side by side with the social, educational and philanthropic activities there went on quietly and unobtrusively, in and among the inner circle of the devotees an influx of unforeseen spiritual strength and faith through a series of severe collective *sadhanas* (devotional disciplines). They occasionally retired to solitary places, to unfrequented villages nestled among leafy groves and wooded retreats where they lived with their families together a life of prayer and penance, abstinence and abnegation, mutual love and forbearance—a form of religious communism which has seldom been paralleled. Individual spiritual culture fell to a discount. Keshub's soul was set on collective *sadhana* —marching Heavenward together—on constructing a communistic Family that would serve as a perfect sample of the brotherhood of man. How all this was sought to be done will appear when we discuss the *Bharat Ashram*. But why, it may be asked, this occasional running away from the world, this retirement to solitudes? Only as a means to the end,—marching spiritually from strength to strength. Was it not Carlyle who said "Silence is the eternal element in which great things fashion themselves together, that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the day-light of life which they are thenceforth to rule"? Even so with this band of pioneers. They sought silence. They needed it for prayer and penitence, for meditation and transfiguration, for the quest after strength and faith. The new idea of living for each

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other in every detail of comfort, care and convenience was by various significant means stamped on the innermost consciousness of Keshub's friends and associates.

Thus during this period elaborate practical philanthropic measures proceeded on parallel lines with the practice in daily life of pristine *Ashram* simplicity and spiritual discipline.

Another outstanding idea must be touched upon to complete the preliminary picture of these few eventful years. The vision of Universal Church had now, by spiritual experience and interchange of fellowship in India and abroad, gained in reality and content. Broad-based on universal love,—the love of God and man—it must in outward form be special and particular to the nation and must conform to characteristic national moulds of thought, emotion and activity. Thus had Keshub expressed himself as far back as 1860, and on various occasions since, with greater and greater emphasis. This conviction had now deepened through wider experience. Was it to rest there as a remote ideal? Or, was it not to be practised in every-day life through work and worship? *Yoga* (communion), *Bhakti* (love), *Jnana* (wisdom), *Karma* (service)[1]—was not each of these to have its legitimate place in the new scheme of *sadhana*? Was *Vairagya* (renunciation) to be left for the *sanyaṣin* (anchorite) only, or was it not to be a shield for the householder as well in the goodly battle of righteousness over evil? Nay more. *Vratas* (vows), vigils, fasts, festivals,—had not all these their characteristic place in broad-based spiritual culture? Must they not be spiritually re-vivified? Above all, was not Love to be the universal solvent, welding all inconsistents into a consistent whole? Divine Love that had flowed to humanity unceasingly through great men, 'the elder brothers of humanity', in all ages and climes stood unrequited, unrecognised. To accept

[1] *Yoga* is union with God by intense contemplation and introspection; *Bhakti* is union with God by intense love; *Jnana* is union with God by deep knowledge; and *Karma* (or *seva*) is the same union by service rendered unto fellow men.

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great men and to try and assimilate the central principle of their life and work in our daily life was the only way of proving worthy of Divine Love. It would not do to approach them as matters of intellectual study. They must be realised as parts and parcels of one comprehensive scheme of Divine Providence,—and the great religions as dispensations of God for the benefit of humanity. Only by assimilating the great men and the central truths they preached and practised into our very spiritual being could we see the inner harmony that pervaded all dispensations. This passion for harmony—harmony of ideals and cultures, harmony of religions, harmony of scriptures, harmony of prophets, harmony of disciplines, harmony of races, harmony between man and man—all leading to a universal harmony, the music of which would pervade life, took possession of him. And Keshub Chunder Sen felt, as no man ever felt, that in the economy of Providence it was a New Dispensation that had come and that India was thrice blest to have been made its recipient; nay more, that she was charged with the sacred duty of living up to it and carrying it to the farthest end of the world. This is the sentiment that pervades his daily prayers, his sermons from the pulpit as also his lectures in English and in Bengali. It is only when one appreciates Keshub's frame of mind that one finds an easy key not only to these utterances of his but also to the multitude of events and activities that crowd these spacious years.

KESHUB'S WRITTEN AND SPOKEN UTTERANCES

These utterances form a literature by itself. Keshub was never at his best as a writer. Among his written treatises, which are few, the two that easily rank the highest are *True Faith* and the *Nava-Samhita*. The major portion of his writings came out in the form of editorials in the *Indian Mirror* or the *New Dispensation* which have been partially published in a collected form. The bulk of his utterances, however, was extempore, in the form of lectures, sermons and prayers both in Bengali and in English. The English

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lectures and sermons, in England and India, have been published in separate volumes. They contain a lucid exposition of his views on social, moral, political, educational and religious reconstruction; also a clear enunciation of the ideal of the New Dispensation. His utterances in Bengali, sermons and prayers, run into many volumes. They form a treasure-house of devotional literature unsurpassed for its lyric beauty. They are yet untranslated, and perhaps untranslatable without risk of destroying their real flavour. Nevertheless for the sake of those who do not know Bengali, it is to be hoped that some day they will be translated. The prayers form a class by themselves. They are simple, artless colloquies with God and are couched in colloquial language of great sweetness. Thus Keshub's contribution to Bengali language and literature is unique. It was he who first broke away from the usual classical Bengali of his time and imparted to it the sweetness of simplicity in which it excels to-day. Is it any wonder that well-known literateurs of the day, who had little in common with Keshub in regard to ideals of life, came to attend his ministrations in the *mandir* just for the sake of drinking of the well of Bengali undefiled?

THE INDIAN REFORM ASSOCIATION

Keshub returned to Calcutta on the 20th of October 1870. Early in November within a fortnight of his return he established the Indian Reform Association. Its object was comprehensive and was to be served through five departments of activity—Cheap Literature, Female Improvement, Education, Temperance and Charity. The object of the Cheap Literature section was to disseminate useful and scientific information among the masses of the people by the issue of a cheap journal and the publication of cheap and useful tracts. It forthwith commenced its activities by starting on the 16th November 1870 a weekly pice paper in Bengali, the *Sulava Samachara*, the first of its kind in India in the line of journalistic venture. It sold in thousands. In two weeks its circulation increased to 5,000,

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LILY COTTAGE—FRONT VIEW

"রমণকুটীর"
আমাদের "অমরধাম"
দিদি -

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and in two months it went up to 8,000[1]—a circulation unknown and unheard of in those days. It was read with avidity by the humbler classes of people who had never till then handled a newspaper, and who were thus for the first time brought in touch with the events that were happening around them. Such was the enthusiasm among Keshub's friends and co-adjutors to supply the insistent demand for the paper that, at great personal inconvenience and hardship, they went about hawking the pice paper from door to door and from street to street. As Mozoomdar observes: "The novelty and success of the newspaper stimulated repeated imitations till at the present moment cheap journalism has become a widespread institution and created a public opinion which the Government itself is obliged to respect. Of this kind of vernacular journalism then, daily growing in influence and importance (and in this matter Bengal has set the example to all other Indian provinces), Keshub Chunder Sen was the pioneer."[2]

Under the auspices of the Female Improvement section was started a Female Normal and Adult School for the education of adult ladies who wished either to be instructed themselves or to be trained for imparting instruction to others. The School was opened in February 1871 and, in the following September, a small Girls' School was attached to it wherein the pupils of the Normal School could learn and practise the art of teaching. Nearly fifty ladies from high class families regularly attended the School every day and received instruction. A most carefully prepared syllabus of studies specially calculated to call forth and develop womanly virtues and accomplishments was drawn up for the different classes of the School. The pupils of the Normal School established a little society called *Bamahitaishiny Sabha* (society for the welfare of women) for mutual improvement, and for the discussion of matters of moment affecting welfare of women. There was also the

[1] *Annual Report of the Indian Reform Association*, 1870-71.
[2] *Life and Teachings*, p. 154. Navavidhan Trust edition, 1931.

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journal *Bamabodhiny Patrika* established in 1864 which for many years had been steadily advocating the cause of women and ministering to their needs. The discussions in the *Bamahitaishiny Sabha* now began to be reflected in the columns of the *Patrika*. Thus the cause of women's advancement definitely entered upon a new phase and the women were awakened to a new sense of their responsibilities and possibilities. To anticipate the later developments of this useful institution, it may be mentioned that the Female Normal and Adult School as well as the Girls' School were in course of time replaced by the Victoria Institution for the education not only of girls but also of adult ladies by a well-organised system of 'extension' lectures which went on for years side by side. Through many vicissitudes the Victoria Institution has served the cause of women's advancement for years. At the present day it is a thriving institution and, most appropriately, its school and college departments are located at 'Lily Cottage',[1] Keshub's residence during the last seven years of his life. Through the generosity of H. H. the Maharani Sunity Devi of Cooch Behar the house has been made the subject-matter of a public trust for the advancement of women.

The third section, Education, undertook to educate the labouring classes, and also to instruct the middle classes in industrial arts. The Working Men's Institution and the Industrial School were opened on the 28th November 1870, the Hon'ble Mr. Phear, Judge of the High Court, presiding on the occasion and delivering the inaugural address. Besides imparting to the labouring classes elementary education in English and the vernacular, the Working Men's Institution afforded them such recreation after the day's work as might keep them from bad company, intoxication, idleness and demoralising amusements. The Industrial School gave instruction to gentlemen of the middle class in useful arts with a view to train them for independent

[1] 78, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta.

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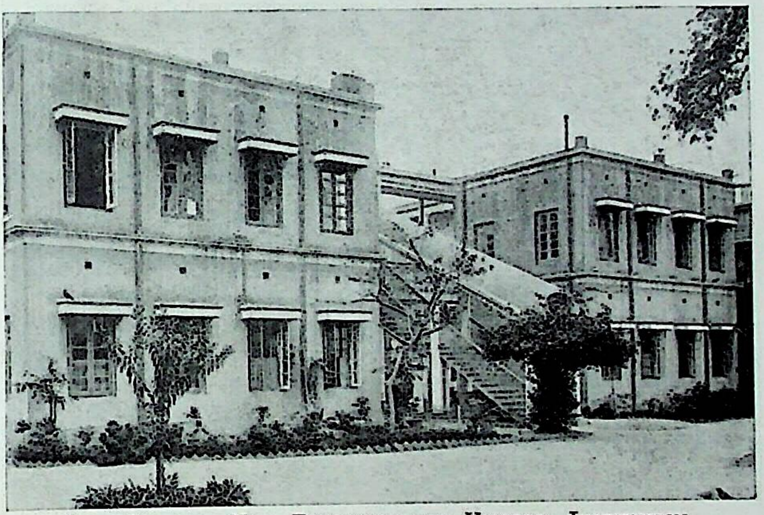
Lily Cottage—Present Front View



Lily Cottage—New Extension for Victoria Institution

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Lily Cottage—New Extension for Victoria Institution

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journal *Bamabodhiny Patrika* established in 1864 which for many years had been steadily advocating the cause of women and ministering to their needs. The discussions in the *Bamahitaishiny Sabha* now began to be reflected in the columns of the *Patrika*. Thus the cause of women's advancement definitely entered upon a new phase and the women were awakened to a new sense of their responsibilities and possibilities. To anticipate the later developments of this useful institution, it may be mentioned that the Female Normal and Adult School as well as the Girls' School were in course of time replaced by the Victoria Institution for the education not only of girls but also of adult ladies by a well-organised system of 'extension' lectures which went on for years side by side. Through many vicissitudes the Victoria Institution has served the cause of women's advancement for years. At the present day it is a thriving institution and, most appropriately, its school and college departments are located at 'Lily Cottage',[1] Keshub's residence during the last seven years of his life. Through the generosity of H. H. the Maharani Sunity Devi of Cooch Behar the house has been made the subject-matter of a public trust for the advancement of women.

The third section, Education, undertook to educate the labouring classes, and also to instruct the middle classes in industrial arts. The Working Men's Institution and the Industrial School were opened on the 28th November 1870, the Hon'ble Mr. Phear, Judge of the High Court, presiding on the occasion and delivering the inaugural address. Besides imparting to the labouring classes elementary education in English and the vernacular, the Working Men's Institution afforded them such recreation after the day's work as might keep them from bad company, intoxication, idleness and demoralising amusements. The Industrial School gave instruction to gentlemen of the middle class in useful arts with a view to train them for independent

[1] 78, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta.

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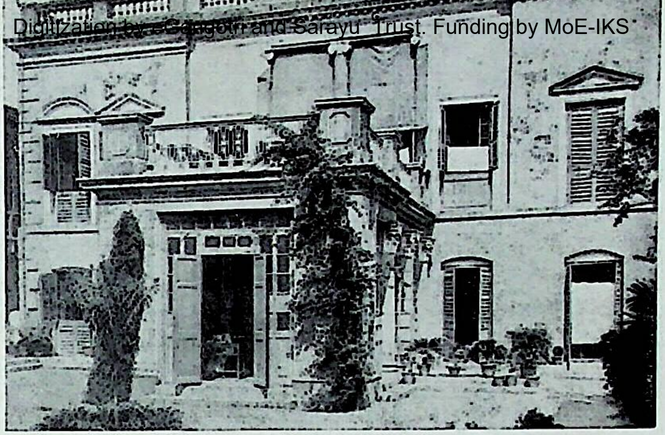
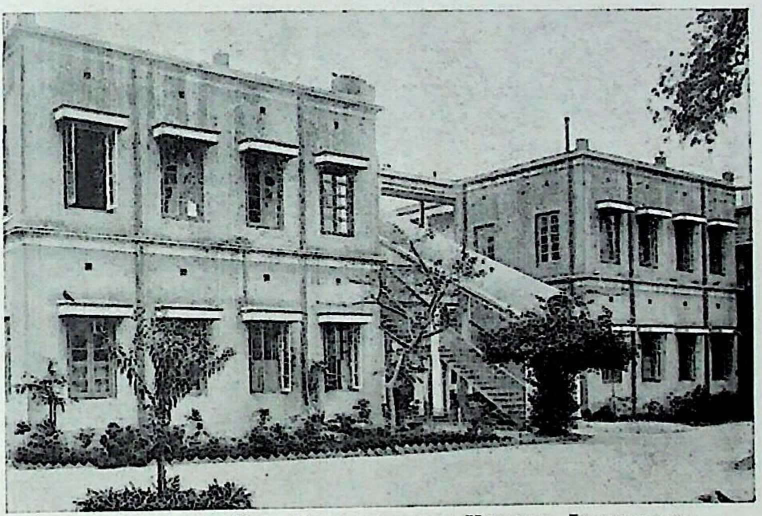


LILY COTTAGE—PRESENT FRONT VIEW



LILY COTTAGE—NEW EXTENSION FOR VICTORIA INSTITUTION

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LILY COTTAGE—NEW EXTENSION FOR VICTORIA INSTITUTION

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occupations. The first year's report said, "It is to be hoped that with such taste and training they will be able not only to benefit themselves by earning independent livelihood but also to confer lasting benefit on their country by promoting its material prosperity and helping the development of its material resources. The young men of higher classes may also find in this school opportunities of learning useful arts for purposes of utility and pleasure." Carpentry, tailoring, clock and watch repairing, printing, lithography and engraving were among the subjects in which instruction was given. The work of this section filled the voluntary workers with a new type of zeal and energy. They threw themselves into it with enthusiasm, some teaching the labouring classes, others becoming learners in the Industrial School. "The sawing, chopping, hammering went on with undiminished vigour, month after month ; boxes, chairs and cabinets sprang into existence. Clerks from Government offices, graduates from the neighbouring colleges, Brahma Missionaries headed by Keshub himself took to these occupations with workman-like avidity; while professional book-binders, tinkers and carpenters plodded at literary industry, reading primers and working sums at arithmetic under the feeble light of oil-lamps long after nightfall."[1]

To turn away from the main narrative for a moment, it is interesting to note how thoroughly Keshub felt himself in his element in the Industrial School and how fully he utilised this opportunity of learning handicrafts. His biographer observes:

> With what effect Keshub learnt these handicrafts was seen during his last illness at Simla when, being medically ordered to take to light work, he produced his celebrated treatise on *Yoga*[2] on the one hand and on the other busied himself in turning out little pieces of furniture, the workmanship of which made some one exclaim "he could not have done better if he had given his

[1] *Life and Teachings*, p. 156. Navavidhan Trust edition, 1931.

[2] *Yoga Subjective and Objective* by Keshub Chunder Sen. It first appeared in 1883 in the columns of the *Independent* of New York in serial contributions and was afterwards published in book form.

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whole life to carpentry alone." Keshub was a mechanic and artist by nature. He had an inborn propensity for fixing furnitures, hanging pictures, screening cabinets, raising structures and managing machinery. He devoted hours and days to such occupations with surprising seriousness. His stage-managing gifts first evidenced at the youthful dramas, he retained to the last. At one time, when he was a very young man he drew and painted all sorts of pictures with great persistency. He had a scrupulously neat handwriting, the result of much careful practice. Whatever he planned, or executed, was characterised by a taste and an exquisiteness peculiarly his own. He was a lover of beauty, both internal and external, and he knew, besides, the art of making the beautiful useful.

It only remains to be mentioned that the present Working Men's Institution of Calcutta may well be regarded as the descendant of the Institution of 1870, for it derives its inspiration and drive entirely from the same source that brought the Institution of 1870 into being.

The object of the Temperance section of the Reform Association was two-fold: first, to instil into the minds of the rising generation a definite aversion to the drink habit which was a growing evil in the seventies of the last century, secondly, to wage war against the drink evil by exposing the iniquity of the Government's liquor policy and by reforming the excise administration of the country. The first object was served by the Band of Hope for young men. The members took the vow of total abstinence. They walked in processions, banners flying, singing temperance songs with great gusto. They had lectures and pamphlets and tracts through which they carried on the crusade till the membership swelled to large numbers. Many a young man of those days has, later in life, testified to the tremendous influence which the Band of Hope exercised on the life and conduct of that generation. The second object was served by a vigilant propaganda, by publication of statistics of crime, disease and death arising from intemperance, by formation of branch societies and by co-operation with the leaders of the Temperance movement in England, specially with the United Kingdom Alliance. A vernacular paper under the name *Mada na Garal* (Wine or Poison?) was

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I am glad to learn you have already raised, by your remarkably indefatigable exertions, the sum of 50 £ for the organ. If you can send it to us in January it will be in very good time; all our friends will be expecting it then, and the occasion will be truly grand. It is to be hoped there will be no delays. A steamer coming through the Suez Canal will bring it to us, I believe, in six weeks. Our anniversary takes place in the third week of January.

Mr. Anderson's rates, as I understand them now, will not suit us. So you need not trouble yourself about the matter.

Good Mr. Glover has at last left this world of sorrow and suffering and gone to his happy home. He is with our Father. May He have eternal peace!

Give my love to Mrs. Spears and 1000 kisses to sweet little John. The photograph sent to Promunno I have taken from him, because I never received any.

Yours Very Affectionately
Keshub Chunder Sen

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started and broadcast *gratis*. Memorials were submitted to Government and caused to be submitted through other influential public bodies, pressing for revision of the excise system and embodying substantive proposals for reform. Thus everything possible was done by the Reform Association to combat the drink evil.

The Charity Section was equally active. Apart from almsgiving or extending help to the distressed and the indigent, it organised distribution of medicine and food supply to large tracts of country visited with epidemic diseases.

THE LETTERS OF INDOPHILUS—1872

The year 1872 was fully occupied with notable public activities. The fact that Keshub had placed Education in the forefront of his programme is evidenced by his Nine Open Letters from Indophilus on Educational measures addressed to Lord Northbrook in that year. They covered a wide field—national education, mass education, vernacular education, vocational and technical education, moral and religious training on non-sectarian lines—indeed all the burning problems which to our untold shame remain unsolved to this day.

THE SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT

(Act III of 1872)

It will be remembered that it was at Keshub's instance that a Marriage Bill was framed and put before the legislature in 1868. After weathering many storms and undergoing many changes it was finally passed into law in 1872, as the Special Marriage Act (Act III of 1872). The question has often been asked 'Why did Keshub resort to legislation for validating marriages? Why did he not leave it to time, so that a custom might gradually grow up and crystallise into something that would almost have the force of law?' These critics forget the cardinal principle that underlies marriage law problems. In the words of the great jurist, Sir Henry Maine:

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Doubts concerning the validity of marriage are not simply serious on grounds of feeling * * * but they are formidable for the most solid reasons. Such doubts are doubts concerning the legitimacy of children; they are doubts concerning the guardianship of children; they are doubts concerning the descent and inheritance of property. And they are specially painful because if the questions involved in them are wrongly solved, the error or negligence of the parents is visited on unborn generations.[1]

They overlook another important fact now almost forgotten. In pressing for Marriage Law reform Keshub Chunder Sen was only acting as the spokesman of the enlightened conscience of India. As far back as January 1856, when the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Bill had been on the legislative anvil, a body of thoughtful and enlightened gentlemen of Bengal numbering upwards of four hundred having no connection whatsoever with the Brahma Samaj, and headed by such citizens of note as Babus Russick Krishna Mullick, Peary Chand Mitter, Radhanath Sikdar, Kissory Chand Mitter and Abhoy Charn Mullick presented a remarkable petition to the legislature praying for "a General Marriage Law for the Natives" similar in substance and general principles to that subsequently introduced by Sir Henry Maine in 1868.[2] They represented that the Hindu orthodox rites of marriage were not conformable to their feelings or consciences, that they were against early marriage and bigamy and were in favour of widow remarriage. They accordingly prayed that instead of the contemplated Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, a comprehensive Marriage Act should be passed on the lines of a draft Bill which they submitted. The preamble of their draft ran thus:

Whereas it is not expedient that Government should interfere with any of the existing religious usages of the country though it is at the same time necessary that it should meet the *legal requirements brought on by a change of ideas in particular*

[1] Sir Henry (then Mr.) Maine in the debate on Native Converts' Marriage Dissolution Bill.

[2] This was the bill introduced on the initiative of Keshub. See pages 70-71 *ante*.

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classes of the community. And whereas there is a class of natives whose sentiments on the existing system of marriage have undergone a change. With the view of meeting their wants but without interfering with the religious ceremonies with which they may deem it necessary to solemnise their marriages, it is hereby enacted as follows.

From the above preamble of the draft it will clearly appear that it was submitted on behalf of the minority which did not believe in some of the orthodox religious ceremonies and which wanted monogamy and widow remarriage to be declared valid and binding. Indeed such has been the case at all times—the legislature has always been invoked for vindicating the rights of conscience of the minority. It is a mistake to think that the marriage law reform sought by Keshub was to benefit the Brahmas only. Time has shown that it has enured to the benefit of a great many outside the Brahma community. Were it not so, it would be difficult to account for the repeated efforts at amendment and adaptation to changing requirements—all by people outside the Brahma community such as the late Bhupendra Nath Basu, Sir Hari Sing Gour and others. Do not these endeavours show that the statute had come to supply a real need? There are defects in it, no doubt, even at the present day. It is to be hoped that they will gradually disappear by well-conceived amendments or re-enactments. But as it stands it represents the triumph of conscience. It makes bigamy penal for those who solemnise their marriage under it, it forbids premature marriage, it makes inter-caste, inter-racial, adult, unidolatrous marriage legally valid. There can be no question that for these reforms the present generation is indebted not only to the legislature but to Keshub for seeking and securing its aid in the teeth of opposition from various quarters. People are beginning but slowly to realise that the evils of marriage customs can only be removed by the strong arm of law.

BHARAT ASHRAM

Nearest to the heart of Keshub was the Bharat Ashram (the Hermitage of India) established in February 1872 at

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a garden house situated on the countryside in a village known as Belgharia, seven miles north of Calcutta. The Female Normal and Adult Schools were promptly removed there with a view to avail of the advantage which the Ashram would afford to the pupil boarders of an elevating atmosphere and a sound moral and spiritual training. It is difficult to over-estimate the pervading influence of this little institution directly on the life of the Brahma Samaj and indirectly on the community at large. In it Keshub visualised the Household of God, the selfless unity and love of a truly spiritualised community. Perhaps one can do no better than present a picture of it in the words of some of those who lived and moved in that atmosphere and whose treasured experiences of the five years during which the Ashram existed proved a perennial source of inspiration to them in after life. Here is one of the testimonies coming from Pandit Bijay Krishna Goswami :

> There is no salvation through individual spiritual culture. All together in quest of salvation and bound by ties of family must advance towards the Kingdom of Heaven. It is selfishness to tread the solitary path to righteousness. We must enter the Kingdom of Heaven taking all with us. It was with the purpose of realising this in life that our revered Keshub Babu established the Bharat Ashram. The *upasanas* (divine services) held there were calculated to bring salvation by means of united worship of the merciful Father to Brahmas bound together by heavenly bonds of brotherhood, and to realise the ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Merciful God in His providence from time to time dispenses special means for removal of special needs. Unless and until the Bharat Ashram is accepted as such special dispensation of His mercy, its greatness cannot be appreciated. Even the loftiest of Heaven's truths gets distorted in the hands of man. If there be no endeavour on our part, the object of the Bharat Ashram will not be realised.[1]

The other testimony comes from Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar, a person of an entirely different temperament :

[1] Translated from *Amar Jibaney Brahma Samajer Parikshita Vishaya* (Experiences of the Brahma Samaj in my Life), pp. 40-43 by Pandit Bijay Krishna Goswami, published under the auspices of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1886.

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* * * About twenty-five families, consisting of men, women, and children thus lived together, having their devotions, studies, and meals together, and showing the noblest dispositions of love and good will towards each other. The Brahma missionaries and their families formed the centre of them all. * * * He meant it to be a modern apostolic organisation, where the inmates should have a community of all things, and where every worldly relation should be merged in spiritual fellowship. He (Keshub) joined it for a while with his wife and children. Every mischievous Hindu restraint was gradually withdrawn, and every obnoxious foreign fashion was discouraged, a natural and beneficial social intercourse being regulated by sound and strict religious as well as moral teaching. Regularly every morning he conducted the domestic devotions with a sweetness of spirituality ever to be remembered. Carefully framed rules and enlightened disciplines were laid down for the daily guidance of the men and women. The institution was successively located in splendid houses and gardens. The unwholesome relations of the Hindu *zenana* life were laid aside, the women joined the men in daily devotions and frequent companionship. The men allowed their manners to be softened by feminine influence and willingly learnt to honour the other sex. The Native Ladies' Normal School held its sittings in the *Ashram*. The *Bamahitaishiny Sabha* convened its meetings there. Thus domestic pursuits, systematic education, entertaining conversations, occasional lectures, and scientific experiments alternated with each other in the routine of the *Bharat Ashram*.

From the establishment of the *Bharat Ashram* began the steady development of the apostolic community which almost to the last day of his life formed Keshub's great ambition. He had laid its foundation in the *Sangat Sabha* in 1860, he had organised it in 1866 in the Mission Office when the Brahma Samaj of India was established, and now he wanted to perfect it further. He felt he had established the Fatherhood of God. All India, and all the world gave him sympathy for that. He now turned his attention to organise the Brotherhood of Man, on a simple theistic basis. The most touching prayers and precepts, which his religious culture and experience could produce, were delivered. * * * The common meals, common studies, common devotions, common work, the whole system of *Bharat Ashram* life was intended to make the brethren and sisters entirely one in mind and spirit. * * * The Brahma missionaries threw their whole heart into the matter, and became much more united in heart than they had ever been. The Church became more perfect. The five years that the *Bharat*

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Asram lasted, it was a useful, delightful, institution. Its influences have changed and elevated the careers of many Brahma families. Its memories, its friendships are undying in their sweetness and sacredness to many souls. The lessons of devotional and apostolical life learnt there have influenced the whole subsequent life of some of the inmates.[1]

Alongside of it there ran another characteristic institution, for young men, called the *Niketan* (Home) inspired by the same spirit of love and fellowship, collective prayer and collective *sadhana*. These spiritual strivings found embodiment in the *extempore* hymns composed by Trailokya Nath Sanyal, the Singing Apostle who for forty years thereafter gave poetical expression to the soul of the Samaj.

THE NEW DISPENSATION COME

Thus the prayers, penances and religious exercises in the *Bharat Ashram*, the *Niketan* and among the congregation generally, were sought to be brought into perfect accord with the dominant idea that inspired Keshub during these few years, namely, living up to the New Dispensation that had come. A re-interpretation of special Hindu cultures and Hindu *sadhanas*, a re-interpretation of the motherhood of God; an emphasis on salvation to be attained through collective *sadhana*—through the realisation of God's Family on earth; through fellowship and communion with the saints and prophets of the world; through practice of the Religion of Life by means of *Yoga* (communion), *Bhakti* (love), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Karma* or *Seva* (service)—these were the very breath of the Brahma Samaj in those days. All these caused a ferment which appears from every page of the prayers and sermons of Keshub during these years. The movement was forging ahead and the conciousness about the advent of a New Dispensation was becoming more and more explicit. Let us take one of these striking utterances—one

[1] *Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, pp. 162-164, Navavidhan Trust edition, 1931.

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of Keshub's remarkable prayers in 1874 which affords the master key to all his thinking and to the collective *Sadhana* of his fellow devotees:

> O Lord! how wonderful is the scripture that has been opened unto us, but wretched as we are we do not care to peruse it. We know not that *our religion is the religion of the whole world*. That is why we think our religion will die leaving no trace behind. Our hearts are buoyed up to think that Thou hast brought the Kingdom of Heaven on earth from the beginning of her history. O Fountain of Love, I perceive *Thy Grace has solved the problem of religions, removed all discord and even unified all truths. May all the saints of the past be relished and cherished by us.* Thou art ever kind. Thou hast initiated us into the Order of Love. O God! we feel Thy love. *Thou hast come with all Thy Dispensations.* Thou art the Lord of Eternity. Not one scripture but hundreds of scriptures lie at Thy feet. *Thou hast come with all Thy righteous and saintly children.* * * * How can we forget Thy gifts of Love? Thou hast revealed so great a scripture to us. We shall *worship Thee in unison with the spirits of the saints of all ages and all countries.* Thou vouchsafest the descent of all great saints of this earth unto us. Dost thou ordain that they be on our side in *the Dispensation* of the Age.[1]

The climax was reached during the anniversary celebrations of 1875. On the 23rd January 1875, Keshub delivered his *Maghotsav* anniversary address entitled 'Behold the Light of Heaven in India', at the Town Hall. Therein he gave a vivid exposition of the New Dispensation and all its implications for India and for the world:

[1] Reference may also be profitably made to *Daily Prayers* (Bharat Ashram), Part I: Prayer of 6th March, 1874, p. 35, Part II, prayers of 24th February, p. 31, of the 28th February, p. 40, of the 4th and 9th of March, pp. 45, 52 among many others of that year. So again the prayers offered in the Brahma Mandir, 15th March, 1874, p. 38, 19th March, 1874, p. 40, 22nd March, 1874, p. 42 and 6th September, 1874, p. 53. In all these the new message is characterised as *Nutan* (new) *Vidhan* (dispensation) or *Vishesh* (Special) *Vidhan* (dispensation). See also *Acharyer Upadesh* (Minister's Sermons) Vol. V, p. 204, sermon in Bengali *Special Dispensation*, 8th March, 1874; Vol. V, p. 215, Sermon *Faith in the Special Dispensation*, 15th March, 1874; Vol. V, p. 230, *Providence—Special Dispensation*, 29th March, 1874.

[1] Translated from Bengali prayer of Sunday the 10th Chaitra, 1795, March 22, 1874, offered in the Bharat-varshiya Brahma Mandir. See *Prayers in Bharat-varshiya Brahma Samaj*, p. 42.

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Behold that Heavenly light in the midst of India! How bright! How beautiful! How it ascends, extends and expands from day to day! Do you see it? It is the light of a New Dispensation vouchsafed by Providence for India's salvation. And do you hear that sound like the rushing of many waters? It is the voice of the Lord. The Almighty speaks unto our country, now, to-day, as he did before unto other nations. It is His word, mighty as the raging whirlwind, yea mightier far than that, containing the message of life everlasting to the millions of this land. Let them that have eyes see; let them that have ears hear. Everything proves, all the events of the age strikingly testify that the morning of India's redemption hath drawn nigh. We are in the midst of it.

Again—

A New Dispensation has been sent unto us which presents to us, not indeed a new and singular creed, but a new development of by-gone dispensations. The Divine message sent to India far from clashing with anything communicated to man by God in ancient times, fulfils all that has been said before. It comes not to destroy but to fulfil the law and the prophets. And while it is a consummation of the teachings of the past, it sows the seeds of future dispensations. The light we see in our country to-day is only the dawn of brighter and fuller light yet to come. As time rolls on higher dispensations of saving truth will be revealed by Providence here and in other countries. In diverse languages and diverse ways will the Lord yet speak to the different nations of the world, through special messages, in the fulness of time, and the word of God shall go on adapting and developing itself according to the altered circumstances and new requirements of progressive humanity.[1]

In the remarkable address of January 1875 Keshub Chunder Sen elaborated with wealth of detail the message of the New Dispensation of which he claimed to be the bearer and of which the cardinal principle was Harmony. It would clearly appear from the passage above quoted that he never claimed absolute finality for the New Dispensation he preached and pursued. To his mind it would be blasphemy to say that the dispensation of Providence would ever come to a dead stop. On the contrary, he firmly believed that, with the process of the suns, as the

[1] *K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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world went on changing and developing so would knowledge, reverence and spirituality grow from more to more; and the Love and Mercy of Providence flow unto humanity through ever-new and ever-widening channels.

A marked feature of the anniversary celebrations of 1875 was Keshub's sermon on the 25th January entitled *Jagat-Janani-Ki dekha* 'Behold the Mother of the World"[1]. This was by no means new. All through these few years the conception of motherhood of God, of the world-Mother, the Mother Eternal grew and grew. The idea of motherhood of God is no new creation. It is ingrained in the Hindu mind. It takes its savour from the particular tenet or creed that the devotee may profess and practise. The Shaiva, the Shakta, the Vaishnava, and any other Hindu, equally find it natural to address his deity as Mother. The colour of his feeling, it is well-known, is determined by the mental outlook, the conception of Divinity, the objective of spiritual discipline which is stamped on the mind of each of these votaries by the cult he professes. For Keshub and his Universal Religion, for the Universal Family that he visualised founded on direct inspiration from *Jagat-Janani*, the Motherhood of God needed re-orientation. It is this that makes his emphasis on motherhood in the New Dispensation a matter of more than ordinary moment.

PARAMHANSA RAMKRISHNA AND SWAMI DAYANANDA

In the middle of March 1875 Keshub met Ramkrishna Paramhansa for the first time. The meeting was unexpected, almost dramatic. Keshub with his fellow devotees had been staying at the Belgharia Tapovan, for practising special spiritual exercises, when suddenly there arrived in a hackney carriage a strange-looking figure who was introduced as Ramkrishna, the Paramhansa (great devotee) of Dakshineshwar. Eager to meet Keshub, he had first gone to the latter's Colutola residence and not having found

[1] *Acharya Keshub Chunder,* Second Part.

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there the object of his quest, had come all the way to Belgharia. He was a man much under forty then. The dreadful austerities through which he had passed had left permanent marks on his physical frame and caused a shrunkenness, a debility and pallor which could not fail to excite notice. Nevertheless, there was in his face a fulness, a childlike simplicity, a visible humbleness and an unspeakable sweetness of expression. He would now and again go off into a trance and become unconscious in the midst of his conversation which appeared at the first blush to be incoherent, even semi-delirious, but was full of pregnant metaphors and pointed allegories. In dress and other externals he was far different from the pontiffs and priests; he wore no saffron-coloured robes, but the common black-bordered *dhoti* (loin-cloth) and the commonest shirt. He viewed with extreme impatience any special honour shown to him and poured abuses on the *Gurus* (spiritual preceptors) as a class. He avoided women and wealth and shunned the worldly-minded. Such were his characteristics. What was there common between him and Keshub—he the priest of the goddess Kali in the temple of Dakshineshwar, Keshub the iconoclast and reformer; he the *sanyasin*, Keshub the happy householder with *sukhi parivar*[1] (happy family) for his ideal; he the recluse who shunned women and wealth, Keshub the man in the public eye moving among the rich and the poor alike and preaching that men and women all had equal rights in the Kingdom of God;[2] he the *yogin* whose *sadhana* brought unconsciousness and trance, Keshub the new *yogin* whose *yoga* lay in the joy of conscious duality? The two would seem to be like polar opposites. Yet there were spiritual affinities which drew them together—the hankering after communion with God, the thirst after companionship with

[1] The title of a booklet written and published by Keshub in which he delineates the joys of a righteous family. Another written at the same time was *Streer Prati Upadesh* (Advice to the wife).

[2] *Naranâri sakaler samân adhicâr; jâr âchhe Bhakti pâbe mukti nâika jât vichâr.*

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kindred souls despite differences, the all-absorbing love of man. It was these that bound them together as fellow-voyagers for life and for eternity. How true and deep was the attachment that sprang up between the two *bhaktas* can only be appreciated by a closer study of the course of their unexampled spiritual friendship that went on till death parted them in this world.[1]

It is sad to contemplate that such friendship should be misunderstood, misinterpreted. It has even been suggested that Keshub borrowed his religion of Harmony, the New Dispensation, from Ramkrishna, despite the fact referred to above that, long before Keshub met the Paramhansa for the first time at Belgharia in the middle of March 1875, the Religion of Harmony had been conceived, named and elaborated in Keshub's prayers, sermons and public addresses. Never by turning away from truth shall we be able to accept Ramkrishna or Keshub, in both of whom burned the passion for truth and reality. It is only when we approach and understand both in the spirit of truth and humility—the spirit in which they found each other out—that we may hope to partake of the riches of their love and fellowship.

In a less intimate, though equally whole-hearted manner there sprang up a spiritual relationship between Keshub and Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder and leader of the Arya Samaj. Swami Dayanand came to Calcutta in 1873-74. Keshub immediately took the opportunity for spiritual interchange with him and went to see him with his friends and associates. Not that the outlook and view-point of the two were the same, they differed in important points of doctrine and devotion. But with Keshub such differences never stood in the way of spiritual fellowship with a man of faith, so true, so devoted. Keshub accorded him a warm and fitting reception at his Colutola residence where the Swami gave an address in

[1] The reader is referred to *Acharya Keshub Chunder* (in Bengali) by Pandit Gour Govinda Roy, for a fuller treatment.

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fluent Sanskrit as was his wont. He delivered two other lectures, also in Sanskrit, arranged through Keshub's initiative, on 'The Worship of One God' and 'The Duty of Man'. The inspiring exposition of his views on religious and social reform led to a profitable exchange of ideas, and established a friendship which proved life-long.

The *Indian Mirror* of March 28, 1875 came out with the following interesting notice of the two striking personalities:

> We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago, and were charmed with the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are the very opposite to those of Pandit Dayanand Saraswati—the former being as gentle, tender and contemplative as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.

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VIII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

(1876-1878)

From about the time of the Bhakti movement in Monghyr, there were two distinct strands of thought in the Brahma communion. With the progress of years each of these was gradually gaining in strength. While Keshub was evolving his ideal of the New Dispensation and fostering courses of devotion and discipline, the two sections were slowly drifting away from each other.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

Their differences centred round the doctrines of Great Men, Inspiration (*Adesh*), Dispensation (*Vidhan*), *Bhakti*, and Asceticism; also round the question as to how far democracy could enter into the domain of doctrine and spiritual direction. These may fairly be regarded as the main points on which one section of the Samaj joined issue with the other. The following is an authoritative statement of the position taken up by the section which differed from Keshub:

During the period intervening between the passing of the Act[1] and the year 1878, the year of the second schism, internal dissensions of a serious character began to manifest themselves within Mr. Sen's Church. Apart from the doctrine of Great Men which has been noticed before, two other doctrines of ominous import, *viz.*, the doctrine of *Adesh* or Divine Command and the doctrine of *Vidhan* or Dispensation began to be preached with some degree of energy and consistency at this time by Mr. Sen and his missionaries. * * * A party of earnest and long-standing members of the Samaj took serious objection to these doctrines and considered them fraught with evil tendencies. They also felt another very great want. They found the Church to be without constitution; the whole thing resting on the

[1] The Special Marriage Act (Act III of 1872).

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shoulders of one man and left without all those legitimate checks on abuse or misdirection of power which a constitutional mode of government alone can supply. They at once set themselves to work to counteract these tendencies, and to remove these wants. * * * They organised themselves into a regular party, delivered public lectures, issued a monthly journal called the *Samadarshi* (or the Liberal) for the discussion of the contested questions and made a series of efforts for the introduction of representative government in Church matters.[1]

KESHUB'S ATTITUDE

It appears that as far back as 1870 prior to Keshub's departure for England, he had foreseen that there might be differences on the doctrinal points above mentioned. Lest it should be thought that they were sought to be imposed upon unwilling and unprepared believers he took pains then to make the position perfectly clear. He raised these specific issues and answered them unambiguously, as follows:—

On certain subjects it is permissible that differences of opinion should exist—such, for instance, as 1st, whether God sends any Great Men; 2nd, Special Providence; 3rd, whether salvation is possible without *Bhakti;* 4th, whether without repentance even the attempt at religious life is possible; 5th, Reverence to spiritual guide (*Guru-bhakti*); 6th, Asceticism or Renunciation of the world. There are differences of opinion on these subjects amongst Brahmas, and there ought to be. Let this be known from the beginning: he who believes in these things is a Brahma; he who does not believe in these things wholly is also a Brahma. There must be a declaration to agree on general grounds, inspite of such differences. So long as we believe in fundamental doctrines, we will worship together in the Brahma Mandir.[2]

ON CONSTITUTION

On the question of Constitution there was between Keshub and the other section, in one particular, a real difference of viewpoint. The latter definitely held that articles of faith must first receive the sanction of the maj-

[1] *The New Dispensation and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj* by Pundit Sivanath Shastri, published in Madras, 1881, pp. 25-26.
[2] *Life and Teachings of K. C. Sen* by Mozoomdar, p. 137.

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SARADA DEVI

H. H. MAHARAJA NRIPENDRANARAYAN
1880

H. H. MAHARANI SUNITY DEVI
1881

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ority before they could be accepted as such by the community, as will appear from the following:—

What shall go forth to the world as a Brahma's article of faith must, previous to its publication, receive the sanction of each one, so far as practicable, of the community in whose name it is published.[1]

More definitely,

No doctrine ought to be promulgated as the doctrine of the Samaj, which is not consented to by a majority of Brahmas. Nothing should pass as an act, or deed, or opinion of the Samaj until a majority of the members sanction it.[2]

Keshub could not subscribe to this view, though in respect of ordinary business matters being governed on democratic lines by majority votes there was no difference of opinion between him and the rest. Thus, unfortunately, misunderstandings and differences grew apace, and the separation seemed almost inevitable. To all these were added in 1878 the betrothal of Keshub's eldest daughter with the young Maharaja of Cooch Behar. This was, as it were, the spark that led to the explosion. Despite their differences the two sections had up to this time remained together till this incident definitely parted them.

THE COOCH BEHAR MARRIAGE[3]

The story of the Cooch Behar marriage may be briefly told: The Government of Bengal was eager to find a suitable partner in life for the young Ruler of Cooch Behar. Nripendra Narayan was then sixteen, and Sunity Devee all but fourteen. The proposal came as a great surprise

[1] Second Annual Report of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1879, pp. 2-5. Printed and published in 1880, at the Sadharan Brahma Samaj Press, 93, College Street.

[2] Letter, dated 18th May, 1878, from Babu Shib Chandra Dev, Secretary, Sadharan Brahma Samaj, to Babu Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar, Asst. Secretary, Brahma Samaj of India.

[3] For a fuller account see *Keshub Chunder Sen, and the Cooch Behar Betrothal, 1878* by P. K. Sen, published by the Book Co., Ltd., 41-4A, College Square, Calcutta, 1933; *Acharya Keshub Chandra* by Upadhyaya Gour Govinda Roy; *Cooch Behar Vivaha: Smritilipi* by Girish Chandra Sen; *A Brief Reminiscence of Keshub Chunder Sen* by Miss Pigot.

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to all. To Keshub it was not only unexpected, but somewhat unwelcome. He had not thought of his daughter's marriage. High-born and brought up under aristocratic influences, Keshub's heart was essentially humble and shrank almost instinctively from anything that savoured of pomp and circumstance. He straightaway declined the offer, but the Government and the Cooch Behar authorities would not be silenced. They had set their heart upon an enlightened alliance, and who was more suitable than Keshub's daughter?

It appears, however, that for a time the negotiations broke off and Keshub was left in peace. Then came the next move of the Government, for giving the Maharaja the advantage of education abroad; they wanted to send him to England. The Maharani-mother protested. Surely, the boy was not to be sent to England, to come back later with a foreigner as the Maharani of Cooch Behar! This opposition set the Government to renew their efforts for bringing about the alliance with Keshub's daughter. It was distinctly agreed that it was really to do duty for a betrothal—the Maharaja was to leave for England immediately after the wedding, and the proper marriage was to be solemnised when the parties came of age. Keshub agreed to it on the distinct footing that it was to be, morally and in fact, a betrothal. This will appear from the letter of Colonel Dalton, the Commissioner, dated January 22nd, 1878 in which he said:

> I know it will seem difficult to you to arrange for a wedding on the 6th March and also that the idea of marriage of your daughter before she has completed her fourteenth year is repugnant to you. But consider the circumstances, and that in fact the marriage will not be a marriage, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, but a solemn betrothal, the Raja proceeding to Europe immediately after the ceremony.

The Maharaja made a written declaration of his faith in Theism, and the Government gave every assurance that the ceremony would conform to the requirements of a non-idolatrous marriage. The essentials being thus secured

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Keshub gave his consent to the match. Looking at the matter across the space of sixty years, the issues that were then raised have lost much of the intensity which was imparted to them in the heat of conflict and controversy.

The question has been asked as to why Keshub agreed to it. Let Keshub himself speak on this most vital point:

> I have acted as a public man under the imperative call of public duty, all other considerations were subordinated to this sacred duty. All other considerations were subordinated to this sacred call, this Divine injunction. * * * * My conscience bade me obey, and there I was an enchained victim before a strange overpowering dispensation of the living Providence of God. I did not calculate consequences though most beneficial results I could not fail to foresee. I did not go through elaborate logical processes of thought. I did not refer to others for advice, though I saw clearly that the contemplated step involved risks and hazards of a serious character, as the Raja was an independent Chief and might fall back upon the evil customs prevalent in his territory. I trusted, I hoped with all my heart that the Lord would do what was best for me, my daughter and my country. Duty was mine; future consequences lay in the hand of God.[1]

Twenty-five years after, Miss Frances Power Cobbe gave a remarkable appreciation of Keshub in which she observed:[2]

> A man cannot serve two masters. Whether to obey the light in us, or conceding a little to the weakness of our brethren to help them to see the light, has perplexed many a noble soul. But to the spiritual man, this ethical problem has no meaning. It is our want of deep spiritual perception that makes two rival masters of fidelity to God in us, and service to our brethren. And Keshub Chunder Sen had that deep spiritual conviction. * * * * The whole question thus reduces itself to this—'Has Keshub Chunder Sen in serving his brethern always stood up to the full height of his moral stature?' A perusal of these letters published puts it beyond doubt that he did. If, therefore, as he says in one of his letters, his conscience acquitted him none can convict him.[2]

[1] Keshub's letter to Miss Cobbe, dated 29th April 1878.

[2] Miss Francis Power Cobbe in her article on Keshub Chunder Sen in *East and West*, Bombay, September 1903.

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May it not be confidently prophesied that posterity will judge him on this and on no other standard? It is encouraging to see that with the lapse of time the great Brahma leader is being restored to the understanding and appreciation to which he is entitled.

The final separation of the dissenting section was effected on the 15th of May 1878 at a public meeting convened at the Town Hall of Calcutta at which was inaugurated the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

Happily, the differences between the two sections such as they were in the sixties or seventies of the last century, have in the course of years gradually grown less and less. The attitude towards Keshub's message has, of late, undergone a change, pointing to a more whole-hearted acceptance of it than was possible before. It remains only to be realised that the three Samajes,—the Adi, the Navavidhan, and the Sadharan—are but different branches of the same tree, different divisions of the same army, and that the time has come for them to join their forces, and to achieve their destiny together, retaining such of their points as may be characteristic of each. Thus alone can they fulfil the ideal of Harmony for which Keshub lived and died.

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IX

THE CLOSING YEARS

(1878-1884)

Amid all the stress and strife of controversy, the even tenor of devotional discipline, on the one hand, and active philanthropic and mission work, on the other, continued unabated. Keshub had set his heart upon realising in a greater and greater measure, along with his fellow-workers, the new ideal of Harmony. For more than a decade he had preached and practised this ideal which to him was the Religion of Life for India and for the world, and the only solid foundation for a National Church. What he said in 1869 in his lecture on the 'Future Church' will here bear repetition:

> The future church of India must be thoroughly national; it must be an essentially Indian Church. The future religion of the world I have described will be a common religion of all nations, but in each nation it will have an indigenous growth, and assume a distinctive and peculiar character. All mankind will unite in a universal church; at the same time, it will be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of each nation, and assume a national form. No country will borrow or mechanically imitate the religion of another country; but from the depths of the life of each nation its future church will naturally grow. And shall not India have her own national church? * * * India has religious traditions and associations, tastes and customs, peculiarly sacred and dear to her, just as every other country has, and it is idle to expect that she will forego these; nay, she cannot do so as they are interwoven with her very life. * * * We shall see that the future church is not thrust upon us, but that we independently and naturally grow into it, that it does not come to us as a foreign plant, but that it strikes its roots deep in the national heart of India, draws its sap from our national resources, and develops itself with all the freshness and vigour of indigenous growth * * * There shall, in short, be unity of spirit but diversity of forms; one body but different limbs; one vast community with members labouring

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in different ways and according to their respective resources and peculiar tastes, to advance their common cause.[1]

Later on, in his *Nava-Samhita* (New Sacramental Code) written during his last illness at Simla, Keshub incorporated his conception of the Church Universal in the Initiation ceremony in which the initiate makes the following declaration:

> I believe in the Church Universal, which is the deposit of all ancient wisdom and the receptacle of all modern science, which recognises in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity, which abjures all that separates and divides and always magnifies unity and peace, which harmonises reason and faith, *yoga* and *bhakti*, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms, and which shall make of all nations and sects one kingdom and one family in the fulness of time.[2]

This Universal Religion, the New Dispensation, in order to be a felt, practised reality must not be based on mere intellectual appreciation. It must touch the heart, the faith, the character of the believers. Indeed Keshub Chunder Sen firmly believed that the regeneration of India, socially, politically, economically and spiritually, could only rest on this broad-based character. Not religiosity but reality was his demand from all, including himself, as the pre-requisite for a revival—reality of the consciousness of Divine Presence, reality of the dictates (*adesh*) of God in every perplexity of life, reality of the perception of *Leela* (Divine Providence) in the dispensations, in the lives of great men, nay, in world-history. How was this consciousness of reality to be attained? Through spiritual culture, through the devotional exercises which he instituted in endless variety, suiting various requirements, during the decade 1870-1880. It would fill volumes to give, in a complete form, an account of his teachings, his prayers and sermons, his manifold activities during these crowded years. His worship melted into the unspeakable sweetness of simple

[1] 'The Future Church', *K. C. Sen's Lectures in India*.
[2] The *Nava-Samhita*, Chapter on *Diksha* (Rite of Initiation).

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child-like colloquies with God. His ministrations in the Mandir as well as in the family sanctuary, where friends from far and near used daily to congregate, grew and grew in the sweetness of reality till his magnetic influence not only chastened them but transfigured them. His rich love, which broke down all barriers and reached out to all, caught on and spread among his people. Some of the special disciplines (*sadhanas*) have been indicated in a previous chapter. But more followed. The classification of devotees was one of them. It will be remembered that *Vairagya* (asceticism) was never encouraged by Keshub as an end, a virtue in itself, but only as a means to an end. It was not to be practised for the sake of detachment from the world, for that would only be negative, but for the sake of attachment to God. "Asceticism leads to poverty of spirit, to simplicity of habits, to a contempt of carnality and worldliness, to devotional habits, increased dependence on God and a culture of personal sympathy with the great departed of the religious world." Keshub purchased a garden in the village of Morpukur about 20 miles from Calcutta on the East Indian Railway which he named *Sadhan Kanan* (garden of devotions). Sometimes the devotees would retire there to live a primitive life of simplicity. They would hew wood, draw water, make roads, cut bamboos and construct their cabins, plant and water the trees, cook their frugal meals and thus spend the days in work and worship, conversation and contemplation.

Thus was the ground made ready for the classification of devotees, for the practice of *yoga*, *bhakti*, *jnan* and *karma* or *seva*. His verbal teachings to the *yoga-siksharthi* (learner of *yoga*) Aghore Nath Gupta, to the *bhakti-siksharthi* (learner of *bhakti*) Bijoy Krishna Goswami, and to the *jnana-siksharthi* (learner of *jnana*) Gour Govinda Roy, have been embodied in the book entitled *Brâhmagitopanishat*, which is a repository of his loftiest spiritual experience, in simple chaste Bengali.

But all this did not interfere with their active duties.

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In the same year (1876) Keshub established the Albert Institute for the promotion of social and intellectual intercourse among all classes of the community. He and his associates went about collecting funds, organising and equipping the public hall (Albert Hall), the library and the reading room connected with the Institute. To-day Calcutta is studded with public halls and public reading rooms and libraries. In those days they were a rarity. The Albert Institute which is still functioning[1] may well be regarded as their fore-runner.

THE PROCLAMATION

After the separation of 1878, Keshub felt more than ever that the time had come for giving to the New Dispensation a more acknowledged place in the community. Accordingly, on the 25th January 1880 during the anniversary celebrations he formally proclaimed the New Dispensation from the pulpit of the Brahma Mandir. With this proclamation was inaugurated a series of sacraments and ceremonials, poetic symbolisms which, with a large number of people, became the very vesture of their devotions.

RE-INTERPRETATION OF RITUALS

The *Arati* is essentially a Hindu mode of worship more commonly associated with the evening service of the deities installed in temples. But from the time of Guru Nanak it has gained its freedom from idolatrous associations. His immortal rapture of adoration as he lifted his eyes to the evening sky lives embalmed for generations in the hymn that broke forth from his lips "For Thy worship, the wide heavens are the holy plate on which the sun and moon are set as lamps; the stars are Thy rich pearl offerings, and the wafted fragrance of many flowers is the incense, and the universal harmony the pealing anthem." This heritage of

[1] At 15, College Square, Calcutta. This is where the Institute was first established and still exists. It has, however, been recently housed in a new building.

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India's rich poetry was not meant to be wasted. And Keshub would be the last man to leave aside the *Arati* as unfit for Theistic worship. The anniversary celebrations of 1881 were signalised by the first *Arati* in the Brahma Mandir.

And this was combined with the Flag ceremony (*Nishan Varan*). How these two picturesque symbolisms were introduced with all the aroma of oriental poetry will appear from the following notice in the *Sunday Mirror* of January 30, 1881 :—

One remarkable feature of the present anniversary was the importance attached to the banner bearing the inscription of the New Dispensation. * * * The Minister gave a sermon on the banner of the Dispensation on the 16th instant, that is, Sunday preceding the anniversary *Utsav*. The banner was explained as indicating renewed enthusiasm in the propagation of the new faith, in the conquest of untruth, in the conversion of sinners. The banner indicates the new spirit of union, the spiritual brotherhood, in which all the prophets of the world had their part, the spiritual army going to vanquish selfishness, discord, false individuality, and to create an organisation which will embrace all mankind. * * * After the *Sankirtan* at sunset began the ceremony, announced before, of unfurling the flag of the New Dispensation. A new form of evening worship, called *Arati*, was first gone through. The *Arati* is chiefly celebrated by Sikhs at nightfall with hymns and the accompaniment of many lights. * * * When this evening adoration was over, the Minister solemnly unfurled the dispensation banner. He then addressed the assembled apostles to the following effect. * * * 'Behold the flag of the New Dispensation before you, under the shadow of which is the reconciliation of all things. There are under it reconciled the four scriptures of four great religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Muhammadanism. The East, West, North and South are reconciled under it. Asia, Europe, Africa and America are reconciled under it. Men, women, the old and the young are cherished and reconciled under it. Wisdom (*jnan*), love (*bhakti*), communion (*yoga*) and good works (*karma*) are reconciled under it. Apostles of the New Dispensation, go, preach, spread the spirit of Universal Union, which the flag before you represents."

This solemn ceremony so full of significance and of poetic beauty raised a storm of protest on the ground that

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it savoured of idolatry. It is perhaps scarcely necessary at the present day to meet this view considering that the whirligig of time has brought on a feast of flag-hoisting and flag salutations and men find it quite natural, nay profitable, to go through this ceremony, for renewal of their vows. It is interesting to note what Prof. Max Müller had to say on it:

If Keshub Chunder Sen insisted on other people doing exactly as he does, the case would be different. But he does not, and whatever you and I and others may feel about the importance of "such things" there never has been and there never will be a religion without a flag. I wish it were not so; but man cannot live on oxygen—he requires bread.[1]

Another devotional exercise carried out with deep earnestness at this time was the communion with Saints and Prophets, or Pilgrimage to Saints and Prophets (*Sadhu Samagam*). The following extract from the *Sunday Mirror* of January 23, 1881 will convey some idea of the purpose and principle of *Sadhu Samagam*:—

The Anniversary definitely prepared our minds for the great enterprise which made this year remarkable in the history of the Brahma Samaj. The eclectic dispensation announced at the beginning of the year necessitated the systematic study of the great leaders who had left their stamp upon the world of thought and a respectful attempt to imbibe the spirit which had rendered them immortal. It was imperative on our part that this study and this attempt should be conducted with the fervour and solemnity which belonged to a religious undertaking, and thus the enterprise in question truly became a pilgrimage. These pilgrimages, which were eight in number, were held in the Minister's residence and were taken part in by all the missionaries and those Brahmas who were closely identified with their work. They were held mostly in the worship-room, and on one occasion in his study where, surrounded by book-shelves loaded with the wisdom of ages and in the midst of literary associations, they communed with Socrates. The following saints were visited on the dates specified against their names: Moses, 22nd February; Socrates, 7th March; Sakya, 4th March; the Rishis, 21st March; Christ, 8th August; Mohammad, 19th September; Chaitanya, 26th September; scientific men, 3rd October.

[1] Max Müller's *Biographical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 157.

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The *Hom* ceremony was performed in June 1881. It symbolised the deep spiritual principle of consuming carnal propensities in the fire of Divine Holiness. To a Hindu mind fire naturally commends itself as a destructive and purifying agent and carries with it traditional associations of the ancient Vedic *Hom* ceremony. The deep underlying idea is thus beautifully expressed in Keshub's invocation and his concluding prayer:

O Thou Blazing *Agni*—

Great, great art thou, great among the forces in creation. We shall honour thee and magnify thee because of thy greatness and majesty. Thou art not God. We do not adore thee. But in thee dwells the Lord, the Eternal, Inextinguishable Flame, the Light of the universe, the Immanent Fire, fire of fire whom fire doth reveal and glorify. O thou brilliant *Agni* (Fire), in thee we behold our Resplendent Lord. * * * *

O God of *Agni*, as *Agnihotri* and priest I initiate the ceremony of the true *Hom* under Thy command for the destruction of carnal propensities. Help us, God, good God, help us. In Thy Holy fire we desire to burn to-day our sins and iniquities, our foul desires and the lusts of the flesh.* * * *[1]

The Fire ceremony was followed by Water ceremony. The destruction of carnality was naturally followed by the symbol of new birth—baptism. The conception of ablution is in the Indian mind inseparably associated with the sanctity of devotional purification. Nay, it is not only Indian but oriental and in this matter India or Egypt, Persia or Palestine are all akin. Inspired by this feeling of spiritual kinship Keshub performed the ceremony on the banks of the *Kamal Sarovar*, the little lakes in his house. Keshub thus pronounced the invocation:

O thou great *Varuna*, water of life, sacred water, mighty expanse of seas and oceans and rivers, we glorify thee. Thou art not God but the Lord is in thee. Thou art full of the beauty and glory of Heaven; each drop revealeth the Divine face. Thou art the water of life. * * * *

He then concluded with a prayer from which only a short extract may be given:

[1] The full account will be found in the *Sunday Mirror* of June 19, 1881.

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> May I behold Thy bright and sweet face, O God, my Father, in the water of grace and holiness that I may be immersed in life everlasting. May Thy beloved Son abide in my soul. May John the Baptist be here to administer unto me the sacred rite and may Thy Holy Spirit hover over my head to inspire me.[1]

Similarly symbolic was the new ceremony of the Eucharist with rice and water. The blessings of God were invoked on the material substances meant for bodily nourishment so that they might be turned into spiritual forces for establishing kinship with Christ and with all the saints and prophets of different ages and climes.

It will be observed that the idea underlying all these sacraments was spiritually to annihilate distance of time and space, creed and colour and, through national moulds, accept and assimilate the truth that lay concealed in them. Thus was impressed upon the hearts of the devotees the cardinal principle of the new life before them in which every purification must be a true *Hom* unto Divine holiness, every bathing must be baptismal and every manner of food must be eucharistic. Keshub, however, made it perfectly clear that these symbolisms must be gone through in true spirit, or not at all, so that they might never become a fetish; and that those to whom they might prove a drag should never take to them.

Rightly does Sir Nilratan Sarkar call this the third phase of Theistic history. His observations are so true, so comprehensive that they will form a fitting conclusion of this subject:

> * * * A phase dominated by the concept of God as *Bhagavan*—the Lord of Dispensations. This phase we find embodied in Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen, the Man of the New Dispensation. He was the type of the supreme creative artist in the sphere of religious life, a genius equally prolific in creating creeds and dogmas, types and symbols, rites and *samhitas* (codes). He could coin into flesh and blood as it were, the religious ideas that have been held in solution in all religious and ecclesiastical history. To mention a few of these—the

[1] *Sunday Mirror*, June 12, 1881.

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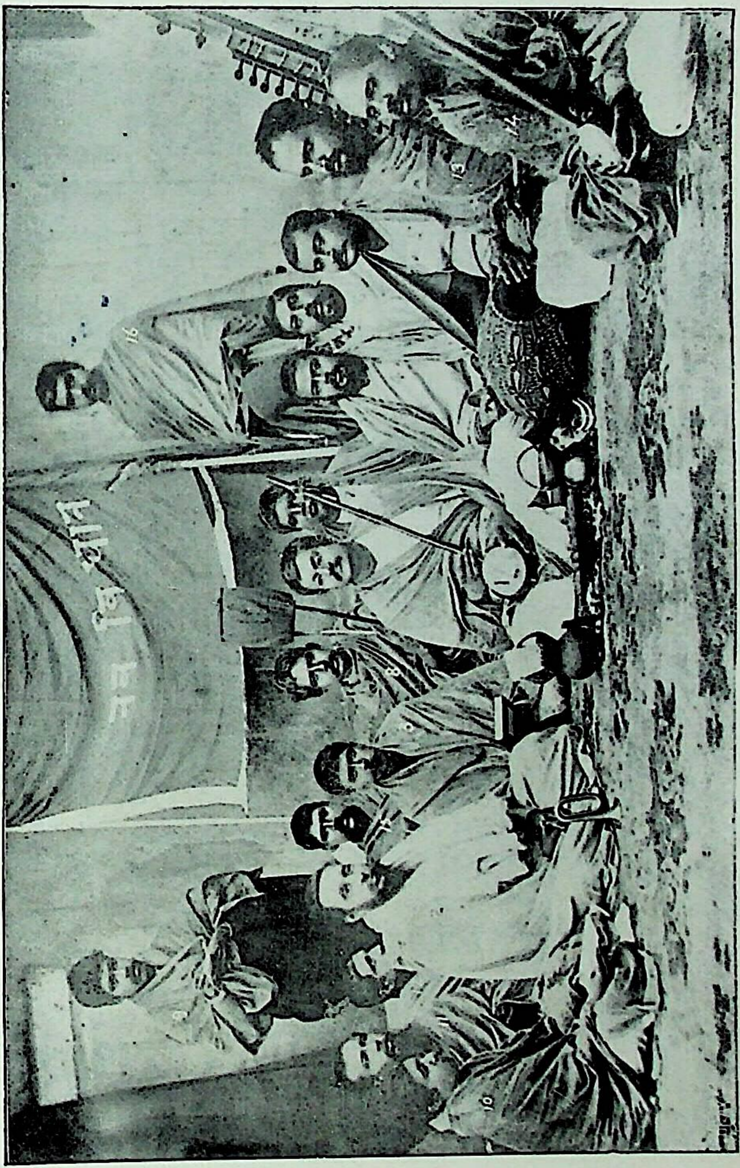

APOSTLES OF THE NAVAVIDHAN

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Great-man doctrine in religion, the doctrine of the Logos and the Son of God, the Christo-centric community of prophets, the pilgrimage to the saints, the communion of souls, the church invisible, the church as the organ of the corporate religious life, the apostolic durbar, the doctrine of special inspiration (*Adesh*), the sacrament of the new baptism and the new *homa*, a new *samhita*—a sacramental code, a new flag and emblem, an All-India Theistic Mission, the revival of *sankirtan*, God-vision and madness in religion, the synthesis of *yoga* and *bhakti* as disciplines, the scripture of life (*Jeevan Veda*), the social reform propaganda, and the Marriage Act. These were among his amazingly prolific constructions; but the most luminous of all was his vision of the harmony of all religions and all dispensations, which will remain one of the beacon-lights of future religious history.[1]

In the same year 1881 Keshub delivered his annual address entitled 'We Apostles of the New Dispensation'. It was a vivid representation of the new scheme of life as bodied forth in the visible church of which he was the minister and servant. The extent to which he had merged his identity in the body of which he deemed himself to be merely a limb, the intensity of his sense of one-ness (*ekatmata*) with his comrades and fellow-workers, may only be faintly visualised from the following declaration which he made in the lecture:

Behind the visible 'I' there is an invisible 'We.' It is my Church that speaks through me. There are others who are working with me in God's vineyard. Behind and around me are brother-apostles, who think and feel and live as I do, united with me in spirit, whose only vocation on earth is to preach the New Dispensation. Yes, there is a Church—a body whereof I am but a limb. Can I alone represent that Church? I am but a part of it. I can no more constitute the Church of God than can a single soldier compose an entire regiment. Accept me then as one among many. Do you see an individual before you? You are sadly mistaken. Behold a band of apostles entrusted with the New Dispensation. As I speak, their voices speak through me. For we are an undivided and organized Church. Here everything is in its proper place, and all the requisites of apostolical faith and fellowship are to be found

[1] Presidential address of Sir Nilratan Sircar at the All-India Theistic Conference, Bombay, 1915.

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here. Here you see God's special Providence working out the redemption of the land, through the instrumentality of a complete dispensation, with its full complement of apostles, scriptures and inspiration. Rest assured, my friends, when we are dead and gone, all the events that are transpiring around us in these days shall be written and embodied in history, and shall be unto future generations a new Gospel of God's saving grace.[1]

The impression that it created can well be gauged from the following interesting critique that appeared in the *Statesman* of January 24, 1881:—

Once a year Babu Keshub Chunder Sen presents himself before the public—steps, as it were, outside his Church, outside the sphere of toil and devotion in which he has passed the twelve months and proclaims aloud in the ears of all the world what the religious movement of which he is the exponent and, as far as we can judge, also the mind and soul, means and does. On these occasions he takes the public into his confidence; he lays his heart bare; he submits himself, his doctrine, his church to the judgment of the critical; he makes his confession of shortcomings; he answers charges that have been brought against him; he exhibits the spiritual attainment of his Church; he sets forth its claims and his own; he challenges censure and commands admiration. Among the remarkable public appearances that he has thus made, that of Sunday last, when he spoke for nearly two hours on the New Dispensation should probably be regarded as one of the most important. One thing at least must be said of it: the fire of the orator's genius has not begun to flicker; he shows no symptom of mental or spiritual decadence. We doubt if ever Keshub Chunder Sen stood forth more impressively as a man of unique and commanding mental power. Probably no one who listened to him would have denied, at least while the spell of his eloquence lasted, that he was a man of genius. Certainly no one who has heard him on former occasions will say that his genius ever showed more strength and brightness than now.

In the middle of 1882 Keshub's health began to give way under the incessant strain of hard work. Medically advised he went to the hills for a change, but he came back shortly after, and resumed his ministration. It was at this

[1] 'We Apostles of the New Dispensation'—*K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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time that, in failing health, he delivered that series of remarkable addresses from the pulpit, which have since been published under the title of *Jeevan-Veda* (Scripture of Life). It is not exactly an autobiography, but it reveals the inner springs of his life and actions in words of extreme simplicity, beauty and frankness, truly typical of the man. The book consists of sixteen short chapters, and has been translated into various languages. It should be read by every traveller on the path to a fuller and truer life. The first chapter in the scripture of life is Prayer.

PRAYER: SEEING AND HEARING GOD

The greatest contribution made by the spiritual genius of Keshub Chunder Sen to the life of India and of the world is that in the days of gross materialism he has brought man into natural and direct contact with God. Not by repairing to a forest, not by renouncing society and its manifold relations, but living as a householder it is necessary for man to see and hear God and thread his way through life's duties in the light of the commandments he receives:

> Seeing and hearing, these are my testimonies. The eye and the ear are my witnesses; I mean the eye and ear of the soul. * * * Our faith in God is not so much a conception as a spiritual perception. We see him as a present Reality, a living Person, with the mind's eye, and therefore believe in Him. Nay we not only see Him, but we likewise hear His voice, as He whispers in our inmost soul to the ear of conscience. He whom we adore is not a logical Divinity but the Living God who makes himself visible and audible to the believer's soul.[1]
>
> No fragments of abstract notions flitting before the student of philosophy, but the perception of the living God, the Personal One, centre and substance of the highest conceivable attributes, that is God-vision. In it humanity sees the indivisible and undivided Deity as a whole.[2]

How is it possible to see and hear God? It is by prayer that it is possible to get direct access to God and hear His commandment. And what is prayer?

[1] 'Behold the Light of Heaven in India', *K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

[2] 'God-vision in the Nineteenth Century', *K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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True prayer is not the language of prayer. It is not words, it is not bodily posture. * * * An attitude of reverent humility and self-consecration, an attitude of childlike trust and meekness, an attitude indicative of a deep consciousness of meekness and a strong sense of the necessity of Divine aid—such an attitude is prayer. * * * And as in the physical world, so also in the spiritual world, you have only to look up and turn your face toward heaven, in order to receive the full measure of light. * * * The very relative position of the eye renders the perception of light inevitable. So it is with the soul. To look up to God in prayer is to receive His holy light. The one is the necessary consequence of the other. * * * This is the whole philosophy of prayer* * * where there is prayer there must be inspiration. Where man cries God's inspiring voice is sure to be heard.[1]

This seeing and hearing is easy, natural, spontaneous. It is Keshub's first and foremost treasured experience. And, in this materialistic age, Keshub proclaims it as not only possible, but necessary for spiritual life. In the *Jeevan-Veda* (Scripture of Life) he thus speaks of his earliest experiences :

The first lesson from the scripture of my life is prayer. * * * In that dawn of my spiritual life the voice that sounded in my heart was 'Pray, pray'. I never knew very well why or for what I should pray. That was not the time to reason. There was no one whom I could ask nor did any one offer to advise me. It never occurred to me that I might be mistaken. I did pray * * * I never took thought whether I should repair to the Christian Church, to the Muhammadan *Masjid*, to the Hindu *Devalaya* or to the Pagoda of the Buddhist. From the first I had recourse to that supplication before God which is greater than Veda or Vedanta, Koran or Puran. To prayer I held fast * * * I did not then think much on the doctrine of Inspiration, but I had the conviction that he that prays gets a response, he that wants to see beholds, he that has a desire to hear is given to hear. By prayer my intelligence was so cleared up that it seemed I had studied logic and philosophy and difficult sciences for decades in a university. * * * Every thing came in time and my life is what it is because I believe in prayer. * * * Therefore keep your prayers pure.

[1] 'Inspiration', *K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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Pray for spiritual things alone and all things else shall be added unto you.[1]

INDEPENDENCE

The access to God which Keshub practised for himself and preached to others was direct, immediate. Nothing was to stand between, no mediator, no *Guru*, no image, no fetish. His creed was perfect independence:

> Independence was my primeval motto. I will not fall at the feet of any man, never sell myself to my superiors, never be a slave to any book, and never perpetually sing the praise of any particular sect. As on one hand I resolved not to do all this, so on the other I resolved never to submit to self-will or to pride, never to be untrue to the vows which I took in the presence of God. * * * If I subjected myself to men, hundreds would have joined my party to-day. If I subjected men to me by any false fascination my party to-day would have been crowded. But I have made independence the captain of my band. Therefore I call those who are with me my friends, I never call myself their *Guru* or master. * * * * I abhor subjection and what I hate in myself, do I not hate in others? I cannot bear to see any one even the least in my Church depend upon another, and it is exceedingly unbearable to me to see any one depending upon me. * * * I wish to grind no man in my mill but want to see every one free. * * * I have given glory to the most revered Jesus. I have abundantly loved Chaitanya but I have never made them the ideals of my life. * * * In the New Dispensation there is perfect liberty for every man.[2]

CULT OF FIRE : ENTHUSIASM

With prayer as the sole medium of communication between God and man, with dependence only on God as the unfailing source of light and guidance, with uncompromising independence in every other relation for himself and for his fellow-workers, he went forth to serve God and man. This was the secret of that fire of enthusiasm that burned within him unabated till the very last day of his earthly

[1] *Jeevan-Veda*, Chapter I.
[2] *Jeevan-Veda*, Chapter V.

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existence. And whatsoever and whomsoever he touched took fire from him. Listen to what he says of it himself:

If I ask thee, O self, in what creed thou wast baptised in early life, my soul answers it was the baptism of fire. I am a worshipper of the religion of fire. I am partial to the doctrine of enthusiasm. To me the state of being on fire is the state of salvation. * * * In the dictionary of religion it is defined that heat means life, the reverse of heat means death. * * * My heart palpitates as soon as I perceive any coldness in myself. It may take time to know whether I am a sinner or not, but it does not take time to know whether I am dead or alive. I at once decide this by feeling whether I am cold or warm. * * * * Therefore, to me a cold state is a state of unholiness. Hell and coldness have been to me always identical with unholiness. Around my heart and around my society I have always kept burning the fire of enthusiasm.[1]

MORAL HEROISM AND PATRIOTISM

This cult of fire can alone account for his unflinching courage which could brave all hazards, every opposition, unpopularity and obloquy. When Keshub heard the call to say or do a thing, no power on earth could stop him from it. They ridiculed him, reviled him, persecuted him, but Keshub went his appointed way.

Believe me, every inch of this man is tremendously real. * * * Whatever my shortcomings might be, I have within me that fearless honesty which, regardless of opprobrium, would tell the public what I really felt.[2]

Can you violently wrest away from me my glorious and beloved fatherland? That is impossible. I hold my ground and with my valiant co-adjutors around me—my proved and tried co-adjutors—I will hold the citadel of Truth and will not give up. Can I give up India and still live? The whole of my life-blood that is in me will dry up in a moment if I am cut off from my mission. I have no life apart from my Father's work.[3]

The intense patriotism which burned within Keshub, and of which the above words are but a feeble witness, gave

[1] *Jeevan-Veda*, Chapter III.
[2] 'We Apostles of the New Dispensation', *Lectures in India.*
[3] 'Am I an Inspired Prophet?' *Lectures in India.*

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Keshub at Simla, 1883

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to his utterances and actions a fearlessness and firmness of purpose which will remain as a beacon light to the present and future generations. It was this patriotism which enabled him to lay the foundation for All-India work of every description, social, political, educational and religious.

SELF-EFFACEMENT

But he never, for a moment, claimed any credit for what he did in his public capacity. His was a heaven-appointed mission and in whatsoever he said or did his individual entity was absorbed and lost in the praise and glory of his Master. Could ever man have spoken so emphatically of his own unworthiness? Referring to his wonderful eloquence the then editor of the *Statesman*, Mr. Knight, said 'When Keshub speaks the world listens.' But let us hear Keshub's own confession:

> Am I eloquent? I never learnt elocution. I have a wild uncultured sort of eloquence which means only emotion. If I am excited I can speak. If I am not, there is neither grammar nor sense in what I say and you will be struck with the poverty of language. I am sure to break down hopelessly if I attempt to speak when my feelings are not properly roused. I am all impulse. When I am once excited you will hear burning words. I will then speak with power and I will certainly crush into atoms the most impregnable strongholds of error. Because it is not my force, my power, which then makes me speak, but the Lord's. If the burning words of truth I speak are words of mine, I am an impostor. If the Lord chooses to speak through my tongue, to Him must I give all honour and glory. Then I am all fire, and I can speak, not only eloquently but I can speak the words of pure wisdom and truth. Leave me to myself and my own resources and in a moment the scene changes. * * * I am not holy, I am not rich, I am not learned. Yet have I the one thing needful. I have faith. And what sort of faith? That which can be converted into bread and water—into philosophy, wisdom and joy.[1]

The year 1883 opened with Keshub's last anniversary address in the Town Hall of Calcutta, entitled 'Asia's Message to Europe'. In April of that year he was medically

[1] 'Am I an Inspired Prophet?'—*K. C. Sen's Lectures in India.*

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advised to go to Simla. It was there while living the life of a true *yogin* that he wrote the treatise '*Yoga, subjective and objective*'.[1] Another remarkable work to which he set his pen was the *Nava-Samhita* (New Sacramental Code) in which Keshub gave a complete picture of the individual, domestic, social and spiritual life which the man of the New Dispensation should lead. This work has been translated into many languages and bears witness to Keshub's cardinal principle that the new householder of the new age should do all things, even the smallest detail, to the glory of God.

KESHUB AS A HOUSEHOLDER

It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a good householder to be a true ascetic. There are duties and responsibilities to his family, friends and society which the householder is bound to discharge. The *sanyasin* is proverbially free of all these fetters. Hence it is that in the old dispensations the *ṣanyasin* alone was marked out for the practice of asceticism. Keshub felt called to live a life far different from that of an anchorite. To renounce his all, to practise the principle of "Think not for the morrow" *and* to live the life of an apostolic householder is the ideal that Keshub set before himself. This is the ideal that he holds up in the *Nava-Samhita* before the eyes of all householders. And did he not himself live it to perfection? As Mozoomdar puts it:

> His domestic life was the example of dutifulness, love and fidelity. Not all the asceticism he ever preached and practised, not all the sacrifices he made of money or of health, not all the long travels he made could take away one jot of the intense affection he always felt for his home and family. * * * If Mrs. Sen had the power to utter her experiences, she could unfold a tale of conjugal affection, which angels might listen to with joy, so mystical and tender was its depth and truth. Many perhaps will remember his

[1] This appeared first of all as a series of contributions to the *Independent* of New York, and was afterwards published as a booklet. Revised edition by Navavidhan Publication Committee.

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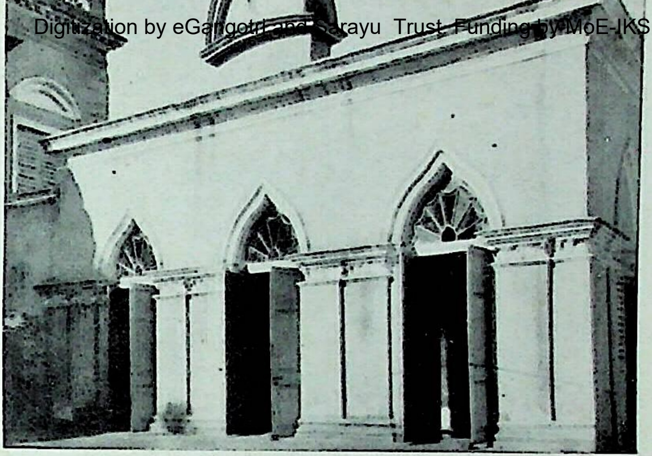
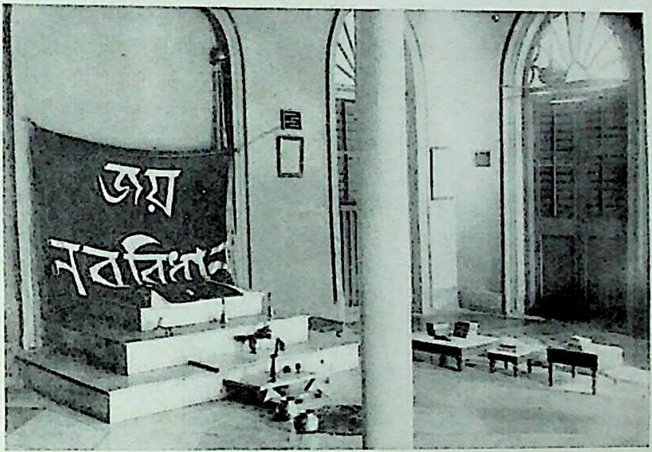


The Navadevalaya—Outer View



The Navadevalaya—Inner View

Keshub's Bedroom—Lily Cottage

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published dialogue of the *Husband Soul to the Wife Soul.* It might not be unfitly compared to Plato's, or Dante's, or Swedenborg's prophetic speculations. This dialogue gives some insight into the relationships which he held should exist ideally between husband and wife, and he faithfully tried to be true to that ideal all his life.[1]

What was the inner spring of this deep conjugal attachment? The consciousness of the sanctity of spiritual companionship. That is what enabled Keshub in 1862 to exile himself with his wife from the ancestral home in order to be together at his ordination in Jorasanko. That is what led him through many trials and tribulations to practise *yugal-sadhana* with his wife, with infinite mutual response; and, later, in 1883 to translate his rich experience into the chapter on 'Spiritual Marriage' in his *Nava-Samhita.*

Himself a happy householder, he was eager to see such happiness spread to other households. Hence the *Brahmica Samaj* (1865), the *Bharat Ashram* and the *Niketan* (1872), the *Arya Nari Samaj* (1879), and the preparatory services for the *Maghotsav* every year in which every domestic and social relationship forms the subject of special vows and ministrations. He took untold pains to impress upon men and women that the home could be made truly heavenly.

He had five sons and five daughters, all of whom survived him.[2] His many pre-occupations never prevented him from giving of his best to them, and they had the consciousness of enjoying the wealth of his abounding affection.

Viewing every humble duty of the household as sacred he imparted to the smallest of details a charm and beauty all his own. Even the *bhandarghar* (store-room), where provisions were kept, did not escape his attention. He had it cleaned, arranged, organised; he had each vessel, each

[1] *Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* by P. C. Mozoomdar, pp. 185-86. Navavidhan Trust edition, 1937.

[2] Karuna Chunder Sen; Sunity Devi (H. H. Maharani of Cooch Behar); Savitry Devi (Mrs. G. Narayan); Nirmal Chunder Sen; Prafulla Chunder Sen; Sucharu Devi (Maharani of Mayurbhanj); Saral Chunder Sen; Monica Devi (Mrs. S. C. Mahalanobis); Sujata Devi (Mrs. S. N. Sen); Subrata Sen.

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utensil labelled or engraved with the word *Mâ* (mother) and the emblem of the New Dispensation. In the midst of all these, there was abundant humanity and humour that made him most companionable to children as well as to friends. He was never demonstrative. There was a sweet reserve which he maintained in all relations of life. Nevertheless, there was a large fund of humour that flowed out of the fulness of his life. In delineating personal as well as national characteristics, in ordinary conversation and even in public lectures, he often indulged in a kindly humour that in an instant brought on laughter—the surest means of establishing fellowship.

THE END

Keshub returned to Calcutta, but his illness showed no signs of abatement. All his friends and fellow-workers felt but too keenly that his earthly life was drawing to a close. His last ministration was in connection with the consecration of the *Nava-Devalaya* (New Sanctuary) on the 1st January 1884. It was Keshub's practice to have his daily devotions with his friends and fellow-believers every morning in a room set apart for the purpose at Lily Cottage. In course of time it was found that the number of persons who came from far and near to attend the services grew and grew, till it became impossible for the room to hold them all. Towards his last days he was building a separate place of worship called the New Sanctuary. On the 1st January 1884 fully realising that his days in this world were numbered, he decided on going down to the Sanctuary which was still unfinished, to hold the consecration ceremony. His medical advisers were of opinion that he must not take the risk, but Keshub would not have it. In accordance with his insistent desire, his friends carried him in a chair weak, emaciated, tottering to the place. They put an *asan* (carpet seat) on the *vedi* which was still wet with mortar and seated him on it; and Keshub offered his last public prayer.

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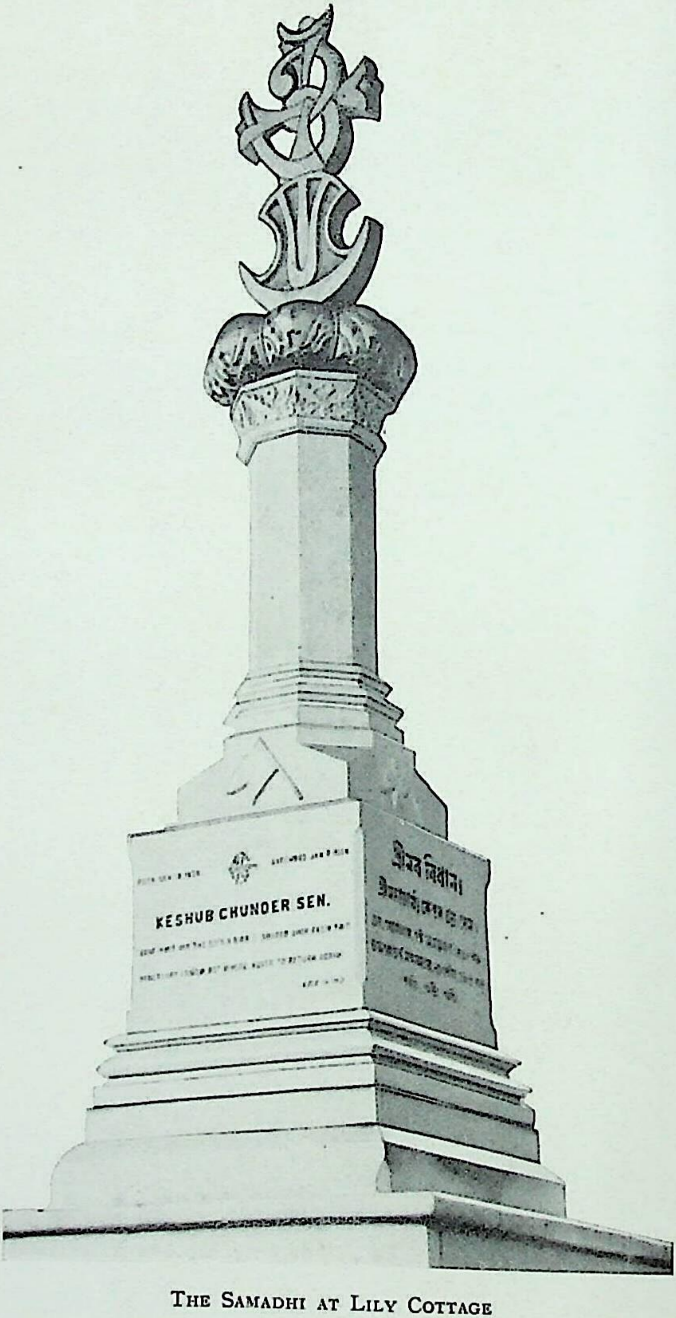

THE SAMADHI AT LILY COTTAGE

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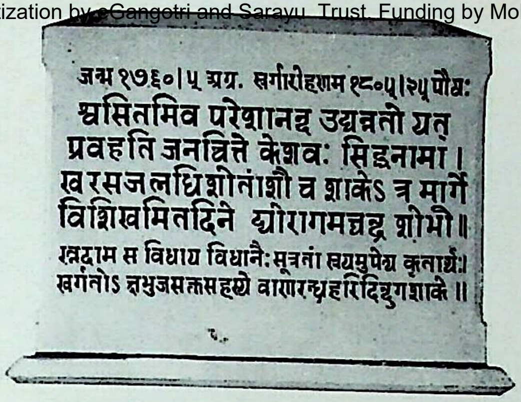

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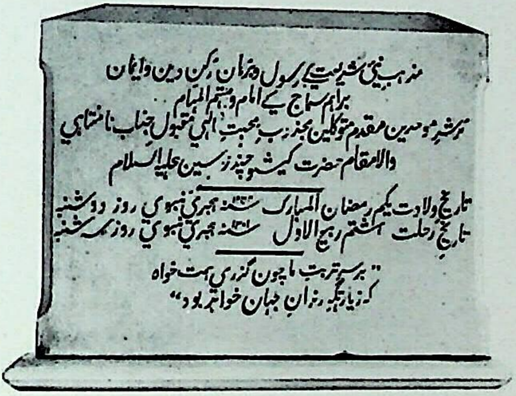

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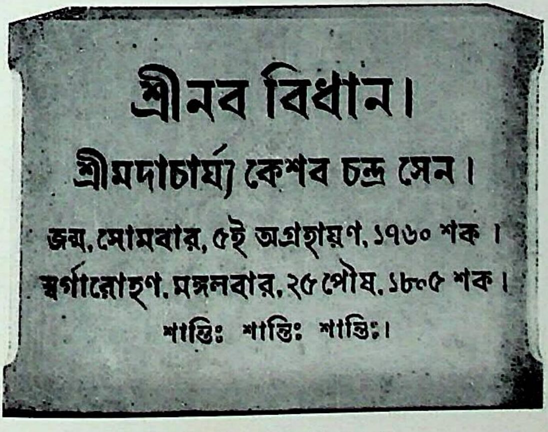

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I have come, O! Mother, into Thy sanctuary. They all forbade me, but I have somehow just succeeded to bring myself here. Mother, Thou holdest this place, and reignest here. This is Thy *Devalaya* (Sanctuary) '*Namo Satchidananda Hare*' (Adore the Redeemer Who is Truth, Wisdom and Joy). This day, the first of January 1884, the 18th Paus, in Thy holy presence, and in the presence of Thy devotees, here as well as in Heaven, O! Thou Spirit Mother, this new Devalaya is consecrated. Thou knowest, O! Supreme Mother, that the number of *bhaktas* who came from distant parts to enjoy Thy festivals on previous occasions was so great that I could not make room for them in my house. Hence it was always my wish to pick up a few bricks, and build a new sanctuary to Thee. To fulfil that desire Thou hast now built this place of worship with Thine own hands for the sanctification of my family, of this neighbourhood, this city, and the whole world. This place where I worship my Mother is my Brindaban, my Kashi, my Mecca, my Jerusalem. Bless, O! Mother, that Thy devotees may worship Thee here, behold Thy loving face, and find peace after the misery of disunion with Thee. Dear brethren, will you not worship my Divine Mother with the flower of *bhakti*? I have seen that this flower of love offered even by the most humble of Her children is so highly prized by Her, that She carries it to Her *baikuntha* and invites all Her *bhaktas* there to come and see it. Ye know not O! brethren, how anxious the Mother is to receive your offerings, and what great care She taketh to store up for you in the world to come Her most sacred treasures. Accept, dear brethren, this infinitely Loving Mother, and ever rejoice in Her. If you worship my Mother and realise Her presence, there can be no more sin and weakness, sorrow and affliction. My Mother is my health and prosperity, my peace and beauty, my life and immortality. I am happy amidst the agonies of my disease in the presence of my Mother and may this my happiness be yours also.

The end came on the morning of the 8th of January. It is impossible adequately to picture the solemnity of the death-bed scene. There were his near and dear ones surrounding his bed, there were his devoted disciples, his friends and followers; and there lay the beloved figure of the leader, with his hands clasped in prayer, and with that face of his, indescribably taking one beyond the bounds of space and time far away into eternity. And as the solemn strains of *Matri-stotra* (Adoration of the Mother) rose in

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sacred Sanskrit from the lips of the devotees, the soul of Keshub was slowly and softly wafted on its wings to its eternal abode. As for its earthly tenement, there it lay—an eloquent witness to the victory of Life over Death, for, behold, "the lustre of an unearthly smile stole over his majestic features" betokening infinite joy and peace. Then the day wore on, and the evening came, the great court-yard and compound presented a strange spectacle. Men, women and children of all shades and grades, of all sects and denominations came crowding,—Hindus and Muhammadans, Jews and Christians, Parsees, Jains and Buddhists, all flocked to pay their last tribute to the departed. They lined the streets of Calcutta in thousands upon thousands up to the crematorium at Nimtola Ghat, hushed in loving veneration. Thus did they bid adieu to the earthly remains of Keshub Chunder Sen. But the soul that is Keshub lives as the soul of New India and shall so live for ever.

The epitaph inscribed on the *samadhi* (tomb) raised over his ashes at Lily Cottage still speaks, in Keshub's own words, of his utter self-effacement:

> "Long since has this little bird 'I' soared away from this sanctuary, I know not where, never to return again."

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